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CÉCILE; OR THE PERVERT.

BY SIR CHARLES ROCKINGHAM,

AUTHOR OF "ROCKINGHAM," "LOVE AND AMBITION," ETC., ETC.



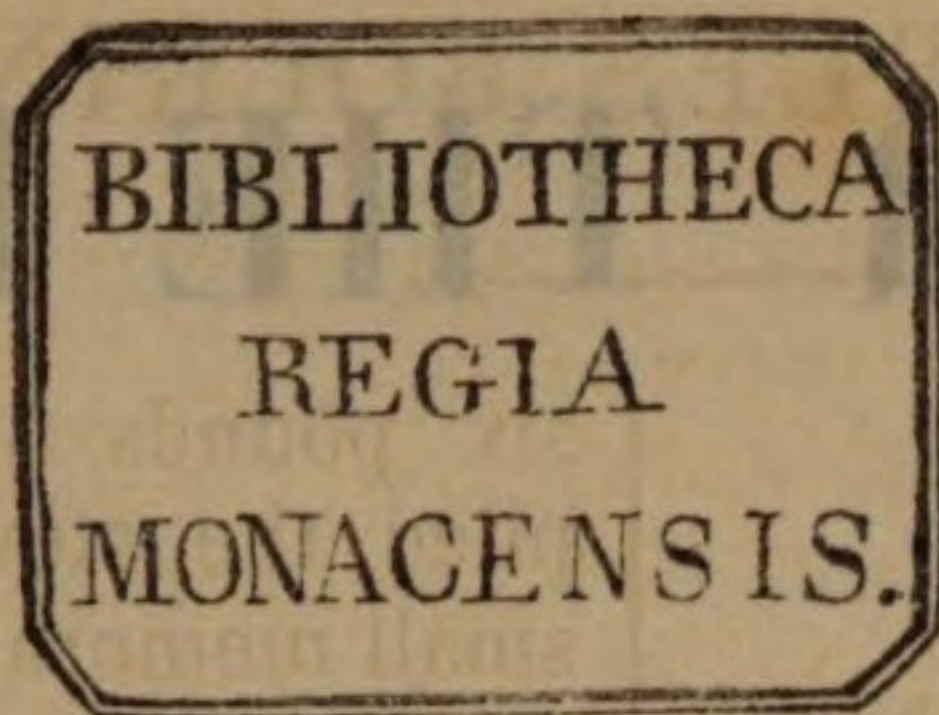
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CÉCILE; OR, THE PERVERT.

BY SIR CHARLES ROCKINGHAM.

CHAPTER I.

BEING THE INTRODUCTION.

OUR first scene opens at Lord Tewkesbury's house, Cavendish Square, London, and in that room commonly called the study, in virtue, no doubt, of a figure of rhetoric which is styled, we believe, the antiphrasis; for the small apartment, though sufficiently gloomy to have been the den of Grotius himself, had seen little enough of studiousness for many a generation.

The dull sultry October morning was already very far spent indeed, but the breakfast service was not yet removed, and though one of the places at the narrow table had now been for some time untenanted, the other had been but very lately occupied, we lament to say, by no other than Lord St. Edmunds, the hopeful heir of the family. The slight repast was, however, soon despatched, with the cordial co-operation of a magnificent Newfoundland dog. The young Viscount having then lighted, what is technically called, his "weed," took up the newspaper, and removed to a huge leather *fauteuil* by the fire-place, where he assumed that peculiarly graceful and dignified attitude very much patronized by the lately risen generation, his back resting against one of the arms, and his legs depending over the other.

The cigar was drawing to a close, when a well-powdered footman entered, and announced that Mr. Longman had returned.

"That's the time of day!" exclaimed our hero. "Show him in, John, by all means," and Mr. Longman, the Earl's steward, was accordingly introduced.

"Come into court, Longman, and shut the door," resumed the young Viscount, in a tone which fully corresponded with the *nonchalance* of his unaltered attitude. "Well, you saw the Earl this morning?"

"I did, my Lord."

"And you imparted to him 'the tottle of the whole,' as 'Joey' says?"

"Yes, my Lord."

"What sort of a little figure did it make when it was cast up?"

"One thousand seven hundred and forty-

six pounds fifteen shillings, my Lord," replied the steward, after having consulted a small memorandum book.

"And what sum or sums, do you know, did his Lordship find to my credit at Ransom's, when he kindly toddled off there yesterday to inquire?"

"Something between seven and eight pounds, my Lord," answered Mr. Longman, a broad grin intruding upon the habitual gravity of his countenance.

"Well, that's better, at all events, than if it were the other way. That respectable surplus being made available, to what would it reduce the general liability?"

"Something under seventeen hundred and forty pounds, my Lord."

"Well, and what did my father say upon the matter when you made it clear to him?"

"Why, my Lord, his Lordship certainly appeared very much put out."

"But he told you to settle the difference?"

"Not at all, my Lord; he said that was entirely out of his power."

"Did he, by Jove! and seriously?"

"Most seriously, my Lord."

"Well, then I suppose that I must lounge over to Paris for the winter-months. When do you think he will come in, Longman?" continued the all-unmoved stripling.

"His Lordship told me to be in the way at about two o'clock, my Lord, and it is close upon that now."

"You don't mean to say so. Then open the window, will you? for this old chimney smokes so confoundedly, that one might almost think that somebody had been forgetting himself here with a cigar."

This sanitary precaution was not taken a whit too soon, for, within a very few minutes, a sharp knock at the hall door proclaimed the return of the expected grandee, who forthwith entered the study.

We should here state, for the information of those among our readers who may not have the pleasure of his personal acquaintance, that the Earl of Tewkesbury is a man somewhat under fifty, tall, erect in his bearing, and whose striking and ruddy countenance seems to proclaim both the dignity of

his descent, and the somewhat irascible frankness of his amiable but rather hasty disposition. The Viscount is of course cast in a slighter mould, but is also considered, both by himself and still more competent judges, as by no means deficient in good looks.

"Well, Sir!" exclaimed the new-comer to his son on beholding him, "I am glad to find you down, at all events. If you have quite finished your breakfast, perhaps we might have these things taken away before it is dark."

"By all means," was the reply; "I have only been waiting to see if you would not like a cup of tea after your morning's walk."

"Il nonsense," responded the Earl, as he rang the bell to order the contemplated removal.

During this operation, he remained perfectly silent, examining, with knitted brows, sundry papers which he had produced from his pocket, and which, to all appearance, were not destined to add much to its contents, saving their own bulk. Nor even did he seem inclined to be more expansive when John, with the tray, had finally retired, leaving him alone with his son.

"It is a fine morning, I should think," said the latter, after a few minutes.

"It has been a particularly pleasant one for me, at all events. Now, I will tell you what it is, Master St. Edmunds; I have had quite enough and to spare of your extravagance and folly, and I am determined to be a party to them myself no longer. Every single year, I believe, since you left Eton, as regularly as summer and winter return, have I had to pay your debts for you; the last time, I told you positively that I would do so no more, and you will find me as good as my word. Why, in the name of Heaven, can't you live upon fifteen hundred pounds a-year, man, and almost everything provided for you besides?"

"Not a single horse, you know, nor so much as room for one since you were advised to let the stables," interposed the imperturbable Viscount.

"And what has that to do with it, pray? In your grandfather's time, I never had more than a thousand, and I never dreamed of calling on him to pay a debt for me."

"But, you must remember, that was in the days of the *post-obits*, which have not anything like the same circulation now, besides that I have the greatest abhorrence for the practice. Say what any one will, it always

looks, more or less, as if one was speculating upon the old governor's existence," continued St. Edmunds, rising up, and passing his arm round the neck of the parent he thus designated; "though he hates me, I am much too fond of him to do that. Come, what's all this row about, after all? I owe about fifteen hundred pounds."

"More than one thousand seven hundred pounds."

"Well, say one thousand eight hundred pounds. I have to meet this, besides a small balance at Ransom's, my next half-year's allowance, and upwards of one thousand pounds due to me on my Ascot book, which I may expect any day now."

"Very well, I am happy to hear it; so you don't want me?"

"Not absolutely, of course; but, as by some mistake or other, one or two of these bills of mine have been sent to you, and might as well now, perhaps, for the credit of us both, be settled at once, why should not you make the required advances, taking my I O U for part of the amount, and stopping the remainder out of this splendid allowance of mine?"

St. Edmunds paused a moment to observe the effect which this proposal might have produced, and, finding it to be very much such as an only and much-loved son not unfrequently creates under similar circumstances, he proceeded in the same strain:

"You know that this has been a particularly heavy year for me. Besides all my regimental expenses, which are awful to contemplate, I have been, by your express desire, amazingly *répandu*, waltzing, polkaing, and conversing most outrageously with every girl who is supposed to have a fortune, and actually dazzling her with the splendour of my get-up."

"Ah! the less we say upon that matter the better," interrupted the Earl. "Did you not most positively promise me, not once, but a hundred times, that this year would certainly see the accomplishment of what I most anxiously desire, and I should like to know where this long-expected wife is?"

"Where? Why at Brighton, at St. Leonard's, or at Bournemouth, actually pining and dying again to behold that dear enchanting life-guardsman, who had such studs, such boots, and such bouquets! But these must be paid for, you know; so, the sooner you ring for Longman, who is waiting there outside for no other purpose, the better, and

tell him to let me have a few hundreds from the collieries—on account, of course."

"Supposing I were again to be such a fool as to do something of the kind for you, what, may I ask, would you do for me?"

"Anything, in reason, that you would suggest."

"Positively?"

"Upon my word."

"Well, then, when does your leave commence?"

"Next week."

"And what are your plans then?"

"To stay on here until the hunting-season begins."

"Exactly, and go and gamble every night at the Coventry Club, with a set of young reprobates like yourself."

"I beg your pardon, my dear father, but you entirely misapprehend the object and nature of that excellent institution. It is invaluable to foreigners, who now, for the first time, can reside in England and dine. As to its *personnel*, if you will but glance over the list—"

"Oh! I know very well; every unhung scamp about the West End."

"I am not aware that any similar term can be applied to such men as Lord Foley, Lord Harry Vane, Mr. Maxse, or the Comte de Jarnac, for instance."

"As to the three first, I say nothing, for none could stand higher in society; the last is a good-for-nothing intriguer enough, by all accounts, but that is not the question. What I wish and expect, in acknowledgment of the very heavy sacrifice that you are again requiring of me, is simply that you should run down for a fortnight or three weeks to your aunt, Lady Helen Basinstoke's, in Lincolnshire."

"Gracious Heaven! and you call that nothing," exclaimed the Viscount. "Three weeks of my precious leave at the slowest house in all England. Upon my word it is tolerably cool on your part, Governor, to make such a proposal."

"Well, then, don't entertain it, and let us each take our own line. It is now four years since you have condescended to set your foot under their roof; and three years, I believe, since you have laid eyes upon her or upon any of them. You know how extremely susceptible they are upon that point, and that there would have been a regular rupture last year if I had not done duty for you. Here are your aunt's two last letters; you can

settle the question with her as you please, for as to my stirring from town for the next two months, that is absolutely out of the question. And now I wish you a very good morning."

"Stop a moment," said St. Edmunds, when he saw his father turning to open the door, "I really had no conception that you could be so anxious about it, or that they were either. I will run down there, if that's to keep things quiet, but for a very few days, mind you."

"Very well; when there, you can write me one letter a-week, and so soon as I receive the second, I shall hand over those papers to Longman. That's a bargain now, though a bad one enough for me."

"And a confounded ugly one for me too," replied the son, "but I suppose that there is no help for it, so come along with me now, and let us have a look at those hunters which are standing at Tattersall's. My cab will be round immediately."

"Cab! nonsense; can't you walk as far as that?"

"Impossible!" answered the life-guardsmen; so the father and son proceeded together in the cab, each highly satisfied with the result of their conference.

Leaving the judicious reader to divine, and future events to determine, which of the two had most effectually carried the real object he had in view, we will abandon them to their silent gratulations, and change the scene to Sir Charles Basinstoke's antiquated mansion, Redburn Hall, Glanford, North Lincolnshire.

CHAPTER II.

A STRANGE ACQUAINTANCE.

A WEEK had elapsed since our hero's very momentous conversation with his father, and his projected pilgrimage having been successfully accomplished, we are to imagine him, as best we may, making his *entrée* into the very comfortable library where his aunt, Lady Helen Basinstoke, Sir Charles, her husband, and a young lady, evidently under twenty, had been for a few minutes assembled before dinner.

"How do you do, nephew, how do you do? right glad am I to see you at last," exclaimed the sturdy little Baronet, grasping the new-comer's hand with fearful cordiality. "Here's your aunt, Lady Helen, who will say the same to you, I make no doubt."

This surmise proved to be tolerably cor-

rect, for Lady Helen's paraphrase of her husband's welcome was couched in these words:

"How do you do, St. Edmunds? I am very happy to see you at length."

"I am aware, my dear aunt," replied our hero, affectionately embracing her, "that you must think me very remiss, in deferring for so long paying my respects to you; yet, I can assure you that it was from no want of inclination, but in consequence of extraordinary pressure of regimental and other duties."

"It is now three years and four months since we have met," observed Lady Helen, whose formal countenance and bearing seemed to betoken a memory peculiarly retentive of everything unpleasant.

"Eh! you don't mean to say so!" replied St. Edmunds. "To be sure, I have been very unlucky; for last year, when you came up to town, I was abroad, and this season, when we were anxiously expecting you, Sir Charles's illness detained you here. I need not inquire how he is now, at all events. But dear me!" continued he, turning suddenly round, and thus observing, for the first time, the young lady already alluded to, and who was sitting opposite to Lady Helen, her chin resting upon her hand, and her eyes intently fixed upon the fire, "I have ten thousand apologies to make; I really had not seen my cousin Constance."

"That's not her, Lord bless you!" cried Sir Charles, with not a little of disparagement in his tone; "Constance has rather more colour in her cheeks than that. But here she is to speak for herself."

As these words were uttered, another young lady entered the room, not very tall and commanding in stature, to be sure, but with one of those faces, which ignorant or prejudiced foreigners are prone to consider as appertaining merely to the ideal types of English beauty, figured in the annual keepsakes. Further I need not describe her, for all those who have seen her will surely not require to be reminded of what they are not very likely to forget; and as to those who have not beheld her, let me recommend them to seek an early opportunity of encountering the joyous glance of her bright blue eyes, though I should advise them not to gaze there too often, nor too long.

No sooner did she behold the new-comer, than she hastened forward to meet him, frankly extending her two hands; but St. Edmunds being a devout observer of old cus-

toms, whenever they coincided with his inclinations, considered that he could not possibly greet his cousin less warmly than his aunt, and he therefore testified his satisfaction at their meeting in precisely the same manner.

The fair Constance, though a shade of pink, if possible still lovelier than usual, mantled her cheek for a moment, immediately recovered her self-possession, and said:

"I really am most happy to see you here."

"You do not add, 'at last,' as the others have, Constance."

"No; for I am afraid that my regret might sound too like a reproach."

"That shows more consideration for my conscience than I deserve."

"That very consideration is intended to bear its own reproof with it, St. Edmunds," replied the smiling beauty; "but we must not scold you, now that we have you at Redburn."

"At all events, not until you have heard all that I have to plead in my defence."

"Ah! to be sure—to be sure, we must remember that he is not quite his own master," observed Sir Charles; "but if we are to dine at all to-day, I suppose it had better be at once. What on earth can they all be about?" continued he, ringing the bell; "it is almost a quarter-past seven, and they know that Edward has sent us word not to wait for him."

The summons was answered by a stout grey-headed butler, who, in reply to his master's expostulation, urged that the dinner had been put off until a quarter-past seven.

"The dinner put off!" exclaimed the latter. "Strange enough that I should know nothing about it in my own house! Who gave the order, pray?"

"Why, it was Miss Cecil, Sir Charles," said the attendant, glancing rather dubiously towards the young personage who was sitting by the fire opposite to Lady Helen.

"Oh! it was your order, was it? I beg your pardon," sarcastically observed the authoritative Baronet, accompanying the expression with a look which an unfriendly witness might have pronounced to be not very good-natured.

She who was thus alluded to and addressed slowly raised, for the first time, her dark and tremulous eyes, and, fixing them anxiously upon the master of the house, replied, in a soft and almost plaintive tone:

"Indeed, Sir Charles, I gave no such

order, or at least never intended to give one. At twenty minutes to seven, I met Mr. Collins; he told me that Lord St. Edmunds was only just arriving, that all the family were still out, and that he thought it might be well to put off the dinner a little. To the best of my recollection I merely concurred with him, judging that you would yourself approve."

"Very well, we don't want an argument upon it. Look alive now, Collins, as you know that I hate late hours."

"Well, but, dear papa," said Constance, coming close up to him, "you really must remember that you to-day are responsible for our irregularities. I thought that we never should get away from the Thornhills whilst you were discussing with them those foolish Lincoln papers."

"Not so foolish, I can tell you, Miss Constance, nor so insignificant neither. Proper advantage it will be to us, in the neighbourhood and in the county, when everybody is convinced that we are all turned Papists, and a fine chance Edward will have of keeping his seat! To think that that boy's election cost me no less than two thousand five hundred pounds, and that now he is about as safe there as if he were my Lord Arundel and Surrey, forsooth!"

"Ah! but I should fancy, dear papa," resumed Constance, "that when this flaming contradiction, which you were drawing up during more than an hour with Mr. Thornhill, will have appeared, all will be set right."

"I should be curious to know who is likely to believe a single word of it," continued the self-exciting Baronet, "so long as we have rascally priests sneaking in and out of this house, and carriages of mine going from the very hall-door to chapel on every Saint's day of their — calendar." We have suppressed the epithet as one more applicable to fragments of roots, which had defied the utmost strength of the wood-axe.

"That is what I have said for many a day, I beg leave to observe," interposed Lady Helen, who, while not conspicuous for any of the exterior characteristics of vaticination, certainly laid claim to an almost superhuman share of perspicacity.

A slight sigh might here have been overheard, the faint response, as it were, of a wounded spirit to more than one blow inflicted by some skilful and well-practised hand; but from whom the gentle protest proceeded our hero had not leisure to determine, for

dinner having been announced, Lady Helen rose immediately, took his proffered arm, and, closely followed by the rest of the small party, adjourned to the dining-room. Here, each member of the family having apparently assumed his accustomed seat, the fair Constance remained at her father's right, leaving the chair between her and her mother vacant for her absent brother, and the place opposite to her to be occupied, not without a little hesitation, by her young companion, who was thus thrown into the immediate neighbourhood of St. Edmunds.

"Well, nephew!" exclaimed Sir Charles, when the soup had been removed, "what news have you brought us from London? Town is dull enough, I should suppose."

"Why, it is tolerably empty, to be sure; but still one always meets some one or another there, particularly in these railway days."

"And what do they say to this infamous Popish business? Not going to submit tamely to the affront, I trust?"

"Those I have seen lately did not seem to care very much about it; I am told, however, that there is some excitement down in the City, and a good deal in the country parts. What do they say to it in Lincolnshire?"

"Say? I will tell you what they say, and what I say too; that it is the most insolent aggression attempted against the Crown and the people of England since the insurrection of our North American Colonies; and that if I had my way, there is not one of these Brummagem bishops and cardinals too but should be marched off at once to Botany Bay, and their successors after them, and we should soon see who would get tired of the game first."

"Ah, so we should," chimed in Lady Helen.

"And what," observed the smiling Constance, "is to become of their flocks, respecting whose spiritual guidance neither Queen nor Parliament ever seem to give a thought?"

"Their flocks, girl! let them follow their pastors, say I, and a happy day it will be for England when they do—ha! ha! ha!"

"I see; our Edict of Nantes recalled, papa," replied Constance, in the same tone.

"What may that be? If it is one of your rascally Popish Bulls, I'd recall it, and no mistake, on the very first day that Parliament met."

This fresh sally gave rise to a laugh more general than the former, and even enlivened with a momentary smile the pensive features of the self-satisfied Baronet's left-hand neighbour. Observing, however, that she still took no share in the conversation, or indeed in the

more immediate concern of the hour, St. Edmunds, who is, as we have yet to show, no less good-natured and kind-hearted than he is well-bred, turned towards her, and softly inquired if she too had been very angry at the Papal rescript.

"I!" replied she, not a little fluttered at the unexpected notice and interrogation, "I! why no, I have not."

"But that's very wrong," resumed the young Viscount, "very wrong indeed. You, as a good Englishwoman, should be in arms and ready to repel this foreign invader wherever you can encounter him."

"Perhaps you don't know that I am—I am—"

"A Puseyite! and you venture to own it!"

"No; something worse."

"Worse!" said St. Edmunds, smiling; "what can be worse at present, except—"

"Except being a Catholic, which I am."

"A Catholic? indeed! I beg you a thousand pardons!" exclaimed St. Edmunds, much concerned, "and I do trust that I have said nothing that could hurt your feelings. Why did you not tell me so before?"

"Because I have always understood that, according to the law of England, no one is obliged to criminate himself."

"Criminate? You do not surely think that it can be considered criminal to adhere to the religion of all our forefathers?"

"Take care what you say," was the reply; "for every day, of late, we have heard of some ancient statute, by no means obsolete, and which renders treasonable, if not the profession of our faith, at least the accomplishment of its most elementary duties."

"And very excellent statutes they are too, old though they be," interposed Sir Charles, "and I trust that, before next session ends, we shall see them enforced, wherever it may be required to vindicate the supremacy of our Queen, God bless her! in every part and parcel of her dominions. But what are you nibbling on at that dry potato for? Are you fasting for the conversion of England from its present Paganism? Have a slice of this mutton with it. You will find it none so bad, I can tell you, though it has been fed upon right Protestant grass."

"I am sure that it is excellent, as usual, Sir Charles; but you know that—that this is Friday," was the soft answer.

"Friday!" exclaimed Constance, clasping her hands, "and I very much fear that there is nothing for her. Dear mamma, it was you

who ordered the dinner; surely, you cannot have forgotten her!"

"I am afraid that I have," replied Lady Helen; "but she can ask for anything she chooses, of course."

"You are very kind, Lady Helen," answered the fair Papist, "but I really am taking very good care of myself. Besides I am quite happy to think, that for to-day, at least, no evil suspicion, such as you most dread, should rest upon your household."

"Come, better have some mutton, after all," resumed the Baronet. "If it is a mortal sin to enjoy so much as we may require of God's gifts, you will be in good company to-day at all events."

"The case is not similar between us, Sir Charles, for I should be doing what I have been taught and what I believe to be wrong."

"Wrong!" cried Lady Helen, raising her hands and eyes. "It is trial enough for a saint to hear such nonsense seriously spoken."

"But, dear mamma," said Constance, "we are enjoined to fast also, are we not, by the ordinances of our Church, as well as by our Saviour's example and precept?"

"I suppose that is her reason for doing it too," interposed the Baronet, with a loud laugh. "Come, say something, Mademoiselle, to keep up conversation. What are your motives for fasting?"

"Simply because my Church so prescribes it; and perhaps we might expect some indulgence from sarcasm on this point, at least, where we are borne out by your own authorities."

"Whereby she means the Holy Bible, I suppose," observed Lady Helen, "which, we know, is an authority with us, though none with them."

"Ha! ha! ha! very good," replied the Baronet. "What do you say to that, Saint Cecilia?"

"Well," answered she, smiling, "I say that, as Sir Charles Basinstoke objects, and very properly too, to religious controversy in his family, perhaps he should not provoke it, and I, unquestionably, should not promote it."

"No, no, no, that won't do," resumed the master of the house, dispatching, like a true-born Briton, his fifth glass of port, "that won't do at all. I shall have to express my private opinion on Popery at our County-meeting, next month, and I should be sorry to state anything which was not accurate and just. Come, out with it at once; do you or

do you not consider the Bible as of divine authority?"

"That is not a fair question, it really is not, my dear," interposed Lady Helen, in her most sarcastic tone. "They cannot help themselves there; for if they affirm the proposition, how can they justify their conduct in withholding the Holy Scriptures from their laity, and to deny it, would be rather stronger blasphemy than they like to utter, at least in England."

"Exactly; very good indeed so far," replied Sir Charles. "Now, neighbour, what have you to say to that?"

"Only to repeat my former answer."

"And nothing more?"

"Perhaps I ought to add, that, being no theologian, I should less than any other venture to intrust so great a cause as ours to the skill of so poor an advocate."

"Tut, tut, tut; that won't do neither. What are you always poring over every religious book in my library and out of it for, Mademoiselle, if you are unable to answer a question so simple as this? But it is all right, and, seeing that it is such a regular puzzler, I can draw my own conclusions for my grand speech."

By this time the domestics had retired, and the din and diversion of the service being over, St. Edmunds' attention was more exclusively called to the conversation which was going on around him. At first, he had experienced a slight misgiving, as to whether these continued and combined onslaughts upon the faith and sentiments of one single, solitary, and seemingly inoffensive individual, were strictly in accordance with his own notions of good-taste, kindly feeling, or fair play. Remarking, however, that such appeared to be the established custom of the house; that the bright eyes of Constance were ever beaming as gladly as if all around were as guileless and as joyous as herself; and, above all, that the apparent victim showed no very palpable symptoms either of suffering or of resentment, he dismissed the notion as being unfounded and unjust towards his relatives. Still, he was almost surprised himself at the intense interest with which he would watch and expect each reply that could be elicited from the fair Romanist, and at the strange relief which was afforded, as it were to himself, whenever she would succeed in extricating herself, however imperfectly, from her difficulties. He gazed upon her more attentively now. Her figure

was slender and fragile in the extreme, and her usual attitude was one of singular depression, proceeding either from constitutional weakness or timidity, or from some secret consciousness of inferiority and dependence. Her face too was pale, and the features, though small and regular, were cast woefully into the shade by the glowing beauty of Constance whenever they were brought into contrast with it. But from the moment when our hero had first encountered her dark melancholy eye, one single glance had warned him that a charm of no ordinary power was enshrouded under those long silken lashes. The soul, the undying soul, was there; all its fleeting joys and sorrows and conceptions and passions for ever reflected in that deep lustrous mirror, and for ever wooing the beholder to sympathize in each transient impulse and impression. Oh! how fearful, yet how enchanting to witness, was the conflict which was waging there during the last and oft-repeated incentives to discussion on the part of Sir Charles and Lady Helen which we have recorded. At length, the long-smouldering fire flashed forth an instant.

"I should be sorry, indeed, Sir Charles," said she, "and more for your sake than for ours, were you so far to lower yourself, as publicly to cast any undeserved censure upon the great body of your fellow-Christians. If, as you yourself state, you are still in partial ignorance of the all-important subject which you intend to treat before assembled hundreds, oh! why will you not call upon one of our divines to explain to you what those doctrines are, which you are preparing to deride and to revile?"

"Exactly," replied Sir Charles; "just wait until you see me closeted with a rascally Jesuit, that's all; only don't be in too great a hurry. Quite enough to have one Papist in the house, and she shall be my authority."

"Then if it needs must be so," resumed she, "remember that, in common honesty, and in common fairness, you may not allude, in the same tone and spirit as Lady Helen, to the great question which you seem so anxious to urge upon me. So far as I have ever understood, or inquired, as yet, we hold the Christian faith to be Apostolic rather than Scriptural, Traditional rather than Evangelical. We have the clearest evidence that the Redeemer called his chosen Apostles together, imparted His doctrines to them, and, promising to be ever present among them until the end of time, commissioned them to

propagate the joyful tidings of His Mission throughout the world. I have never seen that any written record thereof was traced under His inspiration, or that He committed to any one the special task of framing the Christian Decalogue. When, by the sole unaided preaching of the first Apostles, and their appointed successors, the new religion had been circulated far and wide, when countless saints had lived under its blessed rule, and died in its heavenly hope, then (we differ as to the exact date, I believe, but not as to the fact) the first of the written Gospels appeared. These we consider to be historical rather than doctrinal—fully corroborating the pre-existing authority of the Apostolical guidance, but receiving from the Church more sanctity than they can impart to her—invaluable as references and auxiliaries, but by no means embodying exclusively that dogmatic faith which, independently of them, has been perfectly propagated both before and since their promulgation.”

“Ah! how will you make that clear?”

“Others can, whose mission it is; I am merely stating my creed. Differing then, as we thus do, with respect to the origin and object of these Holy and most Holy Writings, should it be a matter of such grave reproach between us, that we should not agree as to their use? You feel yourselves authorized to appeal to them as to a clearly-defined, positive, and final statement of all our duties, doctrines, and obligations; we deny your authority for this interpretation of their purpose, and defy you to prove it. You think it wise, politic, conducive to Christian unity and to Christian peace, ceaselessly to incite and to adjure the blind illiterate multitude to seek out for themselves in those dubious, mystical, and sometimes contradictory pages that necessarily uniform truth, upon the clear perception of which their salvation depends; our Church considers herself bound, as she is commissioned, to expound that truth herself. That is, I presume, the momentous question at issue between us; and, perhaps, you will excuse me for saying that the less it is discussed among the unlearned the better.”

What replies this fervent declaration might have called forth, we shall not attempt to conjecture; for just as other eyes than those of the eloquent defendant were beginning to kindle, though perchance with a less attractive fire, the incipient controversy was, as we humbly deem, most opportunely in-

terrupted by the hasty entrance of the only son and heir of the house.

CHAPTER III.

SAINT CECILIA INTRODUCES HERSELF.

EDWARD BASINSTOKE'S first care was to cordially welcome his newly-arrived cousin; his next, to recommend his own exhausted frame to the peculiar solicitude of Mr. Collins; and his third, to sit down by his mother, and impart to her, with infinitely less concern than he was about to awaken, sundry details respecting the progress of the requisition, now in process of signature among his constituents, with a view of calling upon him to resign his seat. This intelligence having especially engrossed the attention of all other parties present, St. Edmunds had an opportunity of renewing the conversation with his fair neighbour.

“How well and gallantly you spoke out! whispered he. “I like to hear a cause so ably and fervidly vindicated.”

For a moment the dark eye rested upon him with an expression of intense and almost haughty inquiry; but it melted at once, as she said, in her softest and most subdued tone:

“Am I to seek out some hidden sting of irony which your words too may conceal, or can I trust that they are intended to bear nought with them but sympathy and encouragement?”

“Nothing else, in truth, I assure you.”

“They are much wanted. I greatly fear that I have again been sorely betrayed by the infirmity of my disposition.”

“How can you say so? You only spoke after manifold and repeated provocations.”

“That were a sorry excuse indeed for yielding to any such hasty and dangerous impulse! My poor weak conscience had conjured up for itself a more plausible motive, and had fancied for a moment, I verily believe, that my wretched advocacy was needed.”

“Well, I entirely agree with your conscience, and think that it might be not only tranquil, but triumphant; for it appears to me impossible to shed more light than you did, in so few words, upon so abstruse a subject.”

“You are jesting, surely, Lord St. Edmunds; but it matters not. I deserve as much, and more, for having ventured to deem that my poor wax-candle—if, indeed, it were of wax—could be required to show you the lustre of the glorious mid-day sun. No

I am well aware that I have spoken unguardedly, perhaps unkindly, to others, and you will but do me justice if you believe that I already truly repent it."

"You almost lead me to think that you mean to do penance for your spirited defence of your faith."

"I shall," answered she, with a gentle smile, "and such penance too, I trust, as will not only atone for the past, but preserve me from any immediate relapse into similar error. I assure you that it is not a very frequent occurrence on my part, and, as to my uncle, you would do him also great injustice if you did not make much allowance for the effects of the very disagreeable intelligence which he has received to-day."

"Your uncle?" said St. Edmunds, evidently much perplexed.

"Yes, my uncle. Surely, you know that, by nature, he is neither unkind nor uncourteous."

"You really must excuse me," observed St. Edmunds; "but I don't exactly understand to whom you are alluding."

"Perhaps to Mr Collins," was the smiling reply. "But, seriously, are you not aware who I am?"

"Well, I had better own at once that I am not, and that the different terms by which I have already heard you addressed have scarcely enlightened me."

"Oh, yes! I bear many designations. By some I am called 'Miss Cecil;' by others, 'Mademoiselle,' on account of my partly foreign origin; by others again, 'Saint Cecilia,' in token of that very meek and saint-like disposition of which I have taken care to give you one earnest at least, within the two first hours of our acquaintance. Now, can you say who I am, or shall I guess whom you imagine me to be?"

"Oh, pray don't do that!" answered Saint Edmunds, "for you would give to my earlier conjectures perhaps more consistency than they really ever acquired. You are learned enough, and gifted enough, I am sure, to be the instructress of all present here, saving, may be, Edward Basinstoke, who, as I know, is a great scholar; and yet you are surely too young—"

"Too intemperate of speech—"

"No, but far too high-bred and lady-like in manner to be, in short—"

"In short to be, what you still half deem me to be, Constance's governess. Come, I see that I must release you from any further

doubts, or that you will think yourself obliged, in atonement for them, to pay me a multitude of compliments, which perchance you credit even less than I deserve them. Did you never hear of poor Cécile Basinstoke before, the only and orphaned niece to whom Sir Charles, her uncle, has so kindly offered the refuge of his hospitable home against all the miseries, not of poverty, but of absolute want?"

"No, not to my recollection."

"It is very surprising indeed," replied Cécile, with her playful tender smile, "that her illustrious name should never have been mentioned in London, where they have so little to think of besides her. However, I am she, and I trust that I shall be able to show you, before you leave Redburn, that I do not bear quite so ungrateful a heart or so rebellious a spirit as I have entitled you to give me credit for."

Ere our hero had time to offer any reply, a signal from Lady Helen called upon the ladies to retire, and he was left to muse upon what he had heard, or to listen, at his choice, to the imprecations which the now much-excited Sir Charles was in turns pouring forth upon the Bishop of Rome, the underhand dealings of the rival Angersteins, and the unimaginable credulity of the constituency.

When, at a late hour, they rejoined the party in the drawing-room, St. Edmunds found Lady Helen and her daughter seated, each with a book in her hand, on one side of the chimney-piece, while Cécile, occupying her accustomed seat on the other, seemed entirely absorbed in the important cares of her tapestry work. As a courteous relative, he moved forward towards the two former, not without casting a somewhat wishful glance at the empty chair next to his more recent acquaintance; but this was immediately taken possession of by Edward Basinstoke, who at once entered into conversation with his pensive cousin.

"Well, Saint Cecilia," said he, smiling, "you have heard the great news. What should you think of my losing my seat after all, on account of my Catholic predilections?"

"That certainly would be one of the strongest possible instances of popular injustice," replied she; "yet I have little doubt but that you will be able to vindicate your fair fame from such very unfounded aspersions."

"We shall see: I must do my best next

month at the County meeting. Do you think that I can in conscience take such pledges of anti-Papism as will confound and silence my antagonists?"

"I should say that you certainly could, were they to be headed by Spinoza himself."

"Come, come, Saint Cecilia, that is not fair; but we must allow for some little asperity on your part in these days of renewed contentions."

"I am afraid you must, indeed," replied she sadly: "I suppose that you have heard how the poor Saint lost her temper towards the end of dinner."

"Did she indeed? How I should like to have been there."

"Well, it might perhaps have inspired an additional paragraph upon the intemperance of the Romanists to your forthcoming tirade. But see, Lady Helen's eye is upon you, and seems to reprove you for neglecting your London cousin. Had you not better join him, for more reasons than one?"

As Edward Basinstoke did not show the slightest inclination to acquiesce in this gentle admonition, Lady Helen's voice was soon heard, in confirmation of her unheeded glances' true purport.

"Cécile," exclaimed she, rather sharply, "the tea is there."

Her niece immediately arose, and repaired to the tea-table, where she was soon followed by the rest of the party, with the exception of the worthy Baronet, whose cares, sorrows, and resentments all lay buried, for the time, in a state of deep, though by no means noiseless, unconsciousness.

"Is it your cousin who generally makes tea?" inquired St. Edmunds of Constance.

"She does of late," was the reply. "You must know that I have been reckoned too careless and indolent to be intrusted with the very responsible office of satisfying each particular taste, while she is so attentive and thoughtful."

"Ah! it was sharp practice enough on that girl's part, I can tell you," observed her brother; "for now poor Cécile has succeeded to all the scolding."

"And do you get much of that?" continued the young Viscount, addressing the latter.

"Not half as much as I deserve, most probably."

"Then your demerits must be awful, indeed," resumed Edward; "for there is hardly a morning or an evening that I do

not hear her Ladyship exclaiming, in her most impressive tone:—'Cécile, the tea is worse than ever,' or, 'Cécile, the water did not boil; you must see yourself that it did not;' or else, 'That girl is always in the third heaven; surely you might condescend to give us your attention during two minutes!'"

"Edward, my dear, how can you talk such nonsense?" interposed Lady Helen. "I certainly think young ladies would do very wrong to neglect household and practical details, however trivial these may appear to them; and I own, that I do not see anything in Cécile's position or prospects which is peculiarly to exempt her from this general rule, or to render her so supremely indifferent to everything in the world but reading."

"Ah! you must remember that that is the most important obligation of all to her, as she intends to be a governess."

"Indeed!" most sarcastically observed Lady Helen; "I was entirely ignorant of any such views on her part."

"Not more so, I assure you, Lady Helen, than I am myself," exclaimed Cécile, smiling; "but Edward seems to be in a particularly inventive mood this evening."

"Come, come, Saint Cecilia," resumed he, "you know very well that I have good authority for what I am saying. Who was it that was enlarging so eloquently, not three days ago, upon the merits and inward satisfaction of those who enter upon that respectable but much-maligned profession?"

"Well, but if I did say something in commendation of those who shape out for themselves, by their industry, an honest livelihood, without forfeiting what may be due to their birth and original station, I don't remember showing any particular inclination to follow their honourable example myself."

"Oh! that was all, was it?" continued Edward. "There was nothing about your passionate love for children, and your longing to live with them, and to instruct them?"

"Did I say something of the kind?" inquired Cécile, not without a slight blush. "I do not remember ever having considered myself qualified for the task."

"Qualified! I should like to know who is, if you are not. But I should almost suggest, that instead of following out this vocation, by running away from us into a private family, you should open a school, either in the village or at Glanford. I say, St. Edmunds, wouldn't we attend?"

"Rather," answered the Life-guardsman, twirling his dark moustache with a gravity which threw his fair cousin Constance into a fit of laughter.

"And, gracious Heavens!" resumed Edward Basinstoke, "what emulation and contention there would be for a smile, or for a look of approbation!"

"Fearful, indeed," replied St. Edmunds.

"Suppose that in the meantime, Cécile, you were to give us a little music," interposed Lady Helen, apparently not much pleased at the tone the conversation was assuming.

"Perhaps you will kindly excuse me for to-night, Lady Helen; I have such a shocking head-ache, and I dare say Constance, who plays so well, will be good enough to devote herself for me."

"That I certainly must decline doing, dear Cécile. Nothing could possibly justify me in inflicting upon our London cousin such wretched performance as mine, instead of your beautiful playing."

Just then, sundry premonitory exclamations gave warning that Sir Charles's slumbers were coming to a close, and, a moment afterwards, he had assumed his accustomed seat at the tea-table.

"You are uncommon silent and gloomy here, it strikes me," said he; "are we not to have a little music to-night?"

"I have already requested Cécile to play," answered Lady Helen; "but either my wish does not appear to her a sufficient motive, or she thinks that we are requiring of her more than we are entitled to ask."

"No, in truth, Lady Helen," cried Cécile earnestly; "and, if you really desire it, you will find me most anxious to obey. What shall I play?"

"Anything that you will condescend to select?"

Without noticing the asperity with which these latter words also were uttered, Cécile moved at once towards the piano. At first, no one rose to follow her, but ere many minutes had elapsed, the three younger members of the family had drawn close to her again, as if magically attracted within her sphere. She had chosen merely a simple and plaintive German melody, little known, perchance, in what is styled the musical world; but so exquisite was her touch, so deeply and perfectly modulated was every tone, both of the motive itself, and of her own self-inspired variations, that each listener remained entranced, as it were, in

some heavenly vision, until he was suddenly and rudely cast back into the dreary regions of reality, when the wizard sounds were hushed into cold lifeless silence.

"Oh! it cannot be over!" exclaimed Edward and St. Edmunds together. "Will you not play it once more?"

"Certainly, if you wish it; or perhaps you would like to hear another by the same author?"

"More than I can say," replied St. Edmunds. "What is his name?"

"His name is Ernest Reinhold, and, if I mistake not, it will soon be well known to fame, for he feels what he composes."

Notwithstanding more than one effort on her part to escape, it was nearly half an hour ere the fair prisoner could be released from her gentle thralldom at the piano, nor indeed would she have been suffered then to depart, if a signal from Lady Helen had not made all parties aware that the usual hour for withdrawing was already past.

During a few minutes more, the young Viscount lingered on by Sir Charles and Edward, discussing with them how he could best employ the ensuing day, while they would be unavoidably engrossed by the unwelcome care of stemming the adverse tide which had set in against their county influence. An expedition with the keeper after some partridges, and outlying hares, having been finally determined upon, he retired to his rest, vowing that, after all, the life at Redburn was not quite so slow as he had pronounced it to be; a most judicious recantation, mainly inspired, no doubt, by the bright glance and sprightly conversation of his lovely cousin.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SAINT'S PENANCE.

AND well indeed might Constance's beauty have imparted an unforeseen charm to her favourite abode and to the very atmosphere which pervaded it. Nor think you, critical reader, that, if we thus allude, as we shall, more than once, to that beauty—to those beaming blue eyes; to that exquisitely chiselled nose, upon which the skin cannot surely have been drawn so tight without some extraordinary process of nature, well worthy of being exhibited at the World's Fair; to sundry other exterior perfections, in fine—we have no graver and more important tribute to pay to the fair maiden's attractions. Not only is her disposition as

sunny as her complexion, but she is as sharp you must know, as the finest needle in that little case of hers which bears the fearfully prophetic legend: *Qui me néglige me perd*; and amazingly wise, and keeps all the household accounts in surprisingly good order. She is very learned, besides; and should you ever be allowed, as we have been, to intrude yourself into her bower, you will find there—in addition to a Maltese dog, a beautiful West Indian bird, called “Dandy,” and an infinity of flowers—a vast number of books; not silly romances and novels, we can tell you, but historical works, and religious works the most abstruse, in English, in French, in German, in Italian—all of them bearing throughout sundry annotations and reflections, edited and inscribed by the same fair hand and no mistake. But as everybody in Europe knows something about Constance Basinstoke, perhaps we should do well not any further to commit ourselves by such vain attempts to trace her duly recognised qualifications, but rather reveal something respecting the circumstances which had brought her humbler cousin Cécile into such close communication with her.

We have already seen, by the latter's own cursory account of herself, that her immediate prospects in life were by no means brilliant. This extreme disparity of worldly advantages between those who are nearest of kin has nothing so surprising in itself that it should call for any particular notice; but there were certain peculiarities both in the fate and fortunes of Cécile's parents and in her own, which require to be briefly elucidated for the better comprehension of our subsequent narrative. Her father, George Basinstoke, highly gifted enough, by all accounts, as a man of the world, had achieved such utter ruin to himself by his fatal and incurable propensity for gambling, that he had been constrained to fly from England, and pass the latter part of his life in the South of France. There, he had become passionately attached to a young person of most respectable birth and parentage, whom he subsequently married. Within two years of this inauspicious union, George Basinstoke died, leaving his only and infant child, Cécile, to the care of his penniless widow. Mrs. or rather Madame Basinstoke, as she was usually called, discharged her duties as a mother with the most unwearying and affectionate solicitude; but, if evil reports are to be credited in this instance, solitude

and poverty were to her dangerous counselors enough. As she has long since been called to her last account, we need not inquire now to what extent these injurious rumours were founded; but we have some reason to fear that Lady Helen was better justified in entertaining various misgivings respecting the conduct of her foreign relative, than she assuredly was in proclaiming these so positively and so harshly as she occasionally was wont to do.

Cécile was about fourteen years old when her mother, having reached the last stage of a lingering and fatal illness, prevailed upon Sir Charles Basinstoke, after several pathetic appeals, to join her, and be present at the closing scene. The worthy Baronet had ever been most sincerely attached to his deceased brother, and the prejudice which he had naturally enough been led to harbour against his sister-in-law, was rapidly dispelled by the emotions of the awful spectacle that he was called upon to witness. Thus, the last mortal sound which reached the ear of the dying parent was a solemn promise that her orphan child should find a daughter's home at Redburn, and this pledge was as faithfully kept as it was cordially given.

We will do Lady Helen the justice to say, that the consequent arrangement met with no sort of sympathy or assent on her part from the very first. Her foremost duty, she deemed, was to her own children; nor did she conceive that she was acting up to that duty, with respect to one of them, at least, by introducing to her constant and hourly intimacy a companion whose faith, education, and pursuits had been, as yet, the very reverse of what she herself had endeavoured to instil and to prescribe. Sir Charles encountered these objections with such arguments as the case suggested, among which, unfortunately, was a far too confident anticipation that, with judicious management, their young niece's mind and disposition, as well as her creed itself, might yet be refashioned agreeably to the notions of her new protectors.

This expectation, while realized in part, was, upon one essential point, destined to be frustrated. Cécile was wild and untutored enough at first; but, whether through the continued good example of Constance, or owing to the firm and unrelenting severity of Lady Helen's rule, she eventually became, not without some fierce struggles against her fate, as tractable and docile, upon general

matters, as could well be required. But the more successful was her aunt's tuition in this respect, the more completely did it prove abortive in its principal endeavour, that of redeeming its charge from the errors and superstitions of the Catholic faith. That religion little Cécile had vowed on her mother's death-bed never to forswear, and to the fulfilment of this pledge she adhered with invincible tenacity. In vain was she conducted to church, and instructed, not only by her aunt, but by the Rev. Doctor Wellendowed himself, in the leading principles of the Reformation; she could not be induced to recognize, as truly sacred, either the place, or the instruction, or the holy divine himself. Her rosary and crucifix were taken from her; her little library—one volume of Thomas à Kempis, two of Arnauld, and four of Bossuet—was summarily confiscated, and some of her less reverential repartees were visited with such punishments as her age might yet admit of; still she remained inflexible. How much further would have been carried the proselytizing zeal of Lady Helen, whose convictions are ardent as her character is tenacious, we cannot say, had not Edward Basingstoke interfered, and insisted upon his cousin being abandoned to the consequences of her own perverse but apparently irrevocable determination. Through his agency, the pernicious books, the crucifix, and even the rosary itself, were restored; after which, as the crowning concession of parental love, permission was actually obtained for Father Athanasius Fastwell to undertake the spiritual guidance of the youthful Romanist. This new state of things, though unquestionably not equally agreeable to all the inmates of Redburn Hall, had, for nearly two years, received the more or less reluctant acquiescence of all, when the unfortunate incidents concurrent with the opening of our narrative unavoidably led to renewed discussions and difficulty.

It may be conjectured, from the brief outline which we have thus traced, that, during her five years' stay under her uncle's roof, Cécile Basingstoke had not been completely exempted from those sorrows which, under one form or another, would appear to be the predestined portion of all her fellow pilgrims upon earth. Indeed, so utterly intolerable to her at times had been the yoke of iron which her aunt had finally succeeded in fastening upon her, that, more than once, she had been on the very point of spurning it

under her feet, and then flying from it for ever. But, a complete stranger to the world without, she had been appalled to the heart at the notion of treading its dreary mazes alone; one thought besides respecting the kind and honest intentions of her uncle, the fraternal affection of Edward, and the more than sisterly love of Constance, had ever been sufficient at once to quell the rebellious impulse. With regard to the true feelings which had sprung up between her and the heir of the house, we will only say, at present, that we trust we have accurately defined, as above their real nature up to the period when our tale begins; but as to those that existed between the two fair cousins, it would be scarcely possible to exaggerate their impassioned character. While Cécile cherished the lovely Constance with the tenderness of a mother and of a sister, Constance worshipped the very ground upon which the beloved Saint Cecilia trod. Nor is it to be imagined that, if her own independent station and disposition rendered her absolutely incapable of always perceiving and understanding the true bent and effect of Lady Helen's wounding admonitions and taunts, she ever once in her life wittingly suffered her cousin to be assailed or trampled upon without flying to her rescue.

To return to our narrative, however, St. Edmunds saw very little of any of the members of the family on the day after his arrival at Redburn, until they were assembled at dinner. There, Cécile was again his somewhat reluctant neighbour, but, as the worthy host was restored to his usual good humour, the conversation was so general and animated as to leave but very little opportunity for such *à partés* as those of the previous evening.

"Well, nephew," cried the Baronet, "what sport had you?"

"Most excellent, Sir Charles," replied the young Viscount, "for, though I shot very badly, I managed to bag eight brace."

"Besides a dog, I hear," said Edward.

"No, no. I did not quite bag him, happily, though I may say that I brought him home; but he got a stray shot, poor fellow, and gave me an awful fright at first. Luckily, I was close to your village at the time, and I soon delivered him into the hands of so pretty a nurse that he could not but speedily recover."

"I wonder who she may be?" exclaimed Edward; "Redburn does not boast of many

beauties, present company, of course, excepted."

"I have forgotten her name, though your keeper told it me; but she quite won my heart by her charming appearance and manner, as well as by the tender care which she bestowed upon the poor animal."

"Can it have been Mabel Hawthorne?" inquired Edward.

"Exactly; that is the very name."

"Ha! ha! ha!" cried the Baronet, with a very loud laugh. "He was not long in finding his way there, any how. Upon my word, that is capital! Pretty girl; isn't she?" added he, with a prolonged wink.

"That she certainly is, Sir Charles, and so mild-looking and gentle."

"Ah! that's the point, ain't it, eh? Anything but fierce: ha! ha! ha! Perhaps I should warn you, though, nephew, that she is the only bad character that we have about here; but, hist! I must be careful of what I say, for she is a most particular friend of Mademoiselle here."

Just then a letter from one of his constituents having been brought to Edward Basin-stoke, and handed by him to his father, St. Edmunds was enabled to address a few words, in a lower tone, to his silent neighbour.

"So you know this poor girl, do you, Miss Cécile?"

"Yes; very well."

"Do you see her often?"

"Not of late, for I have been forbidden by Lady Helen either to go to her or to receive her."

"Can there be a sufficient reason for such a prohibition?"

"She has no doubt erred most grievously, though I fully believe that she is truly penitent now."

"How singularly attractive, and almost lady-like, her manners are."

"Yes; her mind is superior to her station, and that has been the foremost cause of her ruin. How was she looking in health?"

"Very delicate indeed, I thought."

"Ah! I fear that her days are numbered, nor should I regret it so much, for death would be a happy release to her from much suffering, had she at hand the advice and consolation she most needs now."

"Surely, that cannot be denied to her?"

"It is a difficult and intricate question enough," whispered Cécile, looking anxiously around, to assure herself that she would not be overheard. "The fact is, that

poor Mabel was—in short was born and bred a Catholic, and is still one at heart, though she has been prevailed upon outwardly to profess the Protestant faith by her step-mother, and the rest of her family."

"Her step-mother? I suppose that she is the harsh ungainly Scotchwoman whom I saw in the house with her."

"Most probably; and a true step-mother she has proved to poor Mabel, particularly since her father's death."

When the ladies had retired, the subject of Mabel Hawthorne's misconduct having again been introduced, St. Edmunds ascertained that she had been seduced, about a year before, by a steward of Sir Charles', who had since left his service. It struck our hero that the indignation testified by the worthy Baronet at the frailty of the ill-fated girl was not a little stimulated by the recollection that she had mainly thereby entailed upon him the loss of a most valuable servant; but the matter was dismissed for the present from his thoughts, even before he again found himself in the society of those whose attractions the humbler charms of poor Mabel could never have pretended to rival.

The ensuing day was Sunday, and when the young Viscount entered the breakfast-room, rather late, we fear, he found the remainder of the family already there, with the exception of Cécile.

"I should almost have to apologize, if I had not a fellow-delinquent," exclaimed he.

"All right, nephew," replied the Baronet; "you are in very good time for church; but Mademoiselle had better take care, or she will be late for her service at Glanford."

"I believe that Miss Cecil is already gone," whispered Mr. Collins to his master.

"Gone, Collins! Why, I didn't hear the carriage!"

"No, Sir Charles; Miss Cecil started at eight o'clock on foot."

"On foot, Collins! She will find it a stiff walk enough; four good miles there, and as many back. Why did she not take the carriage? do you know, Constance?"

"I really do not, dear papa," replied she; "but I am afraid I can guess."

"Well, then, what is it you guess?"

"Never mind," answered she, exchanging a hasty glance of annoyance with her brother.

Constance is very seldom angry, or what is familiarly called put out. She is far too well satisfied with the world at large, and with

her own general appearance, ever to betray an infirmity so unbecoming. But when this most rare occurrence does take place, it is a very enchanting and at the same time a very appalling sight, to observe how stern those blue eyes can look, and how closely the smiling lips can be compressed. When it has been our fate to trace some such expression there, we have trembled immoderately at the bare apprehension that we might be the cause or object, and some such feeling, we presume, took momentary possession of St. Edmunds, for he said to her in a whisper:—

“I had no conception, Constance, that you could look so fierce. I trust that I have said nothing to produce so sudden a change.”

“You! no, indeed,” answered she; “but those whom it concerns shall know soon enough.”

These, we presume, were none other than her father and Lady Helen, for no sooner was breakfast over, than she drew them aside, and, with a look of the most determined authority, expounded to them what seemed to be her own private opinion as opposed to theirs. She was soon joined and seconded by Edward, and the result of the conference appeared to be, that the worthy Baronet was moved to something very like regret, while Lady Helen preserved her outward semblance of calm and almost triumphant self-complacency.

The morning was fine for the progress of the family party to church; but during the service the autumn rain and sleet set in with great violence, and right happy were all the party to find the family coach awaiting at the door, to reconduct them in comfort, even through the short space which separates the hall from the village sanctuary. When they found themselves in the library, Constance and her cousin's first impulse was to rush for a few minutes to its blazing fire; but so powerful was the heat, that they soon experienced greater satisfaction in sitting down near one of the windows, and musing upon the pleasing contrast which a good shelter and a bright hearth will in such cases afford to the cheerless atmosphere without. They had not been long there when a solitary and weather-worn pilgrim was discerned, treading her weary way towards the house, along the now miry path which led from the lodge across the park, her clothes drenched with rain and her figure drooping under the relentless fury of the storm.

“Gracious heavens!” said Constance,

“can that be poor darling Cécile? I trusted that she would at least have found some conveyance at Glanford.”

In a moment, St. Edmunds was in the hall, where he seized an umbrella and, without even looking for his hat, rushed out to meet the forlorn maiden. But when, as he approached her, he attempted to open the umbrella, she pointed to the fragments of her own which she held in her hand and said, with a smile:

“It is perfectly useless with such a wind as this. I really am in despair, Lord St. Edmunds, that you should have come out thus, for I am quite wet through and do not feel the rain now.”

When they reached the house, they found Constance at the very door, who immediately took possession of Cécile and accompanied her to her room, from whence they descended, in about half an hour, having repaired all the more disastrous effects of the morning's adventure. By that time, Sir Charles and Lady Helen had both retired from the luncheon table, leaving there St. Edmunds and Edward in close conversation upon the latter's political prospects; but this subject was instantaneously dropped as the two young ladies re-appeared.

“Well, Saint Cecilia,” exclaimed Edward, rushing forward and seizing her hand, “how do you find yourself now? You have brought back colour enough, at all events, to light up even one of our British skies.”

“Ah! I do not like at all to see her so flushed,” said Constance; “don't be talking to her, either of you, pray, but rather assist me in persuading her to take something. She has had nothing since seven o'clock this morning, and then it was little more than a cup of tea.”

This injunction was immediately complied with, and when everything most likely to tempt the abstemious Cécile had been placed before her, the incorrigible Edward renewed the interrupted conversation.

“You have had a morning after your own heart,” said he. “Why, you must have brought back absolution for a forthcoming murder in your pocket from such an expedition.”

“You very much overrate the merits of my effort,” answered she smiling. “I meant to add a charming walk to the satisfaction of accomplishing my Sunday duties, and had no conception that such treachery could lurk behind the cloudless promise of so fair a sunrise.”

"Oh! very pretty and poetical," resumed Edward; "but we have a proper reckoning to settle with her, have we not, Constance? And if it is on account of my electioneering interests that you refused the carriage this morning, I shall set the question at rest forthwith by resigning."

"That would be a notable way of re-establishing me in Lady Helen's good graces," replied she, "and then, indeed, the sooner I become some unfortunate young lady's companion, the better."

"Don't mind him, darling," interposed Constance, "but do try and eat a little chicken; you promised me that you would, after you had had the warm wine and water. I will not positively allow another syllable to be uttered, until you have kept your word."

"I am afraid that it was very imprudently pledged, dearest Conny," whispered Cécile, whose hectic colour had already forsaken her cheek. "I do not know how it is, but I feel very weak—and the heat of the room is, I think, too much for me. I believe that I should breathe more freely in the hall for a moment."

At these words, the purport of which was painfully illustrated by the increasing paleness of the speaker, Constance urged her at once to follow her impulse of leaving the dining-room, and assisted her accordingly to arise. But ere they had moved on many steps, she exclaimed, in great alarm:

"Edward—St. Edmunds, for Heaven's sake support her! I knew she had fearfully overtaxed her strength."

Both the young men sprang forward together at this summons, and our hero, who was nearest to the drooping Cécile, seized her wrist to uphold her as she was gliding to the ground from Constance's unavailing embrace. A faint cry of intense anguish responded at once to his over-zealous grasp.

"Take care," said Edward; "she is so delicate. Lay her on the floor, Conny, now that she is quite insensible. She will soon come to herself again."

"Surely, I cannot have hurt her," muttered the disconsolate Viscount, who had not relinquished the frail hand that he still held in his own; "and yet I certainly did feel something like a nasty rough bracelet under her sleeve. God bless my soul! there's blood upon her hand now!"

"So there is; what can be the cause of it, Edward?" cried Constance.

"It must be some horrible torture of her

invention," replied he, and the all-motionless arm having been bared a little, a gold bracelet was removed, and the true cause, both of the momentary pain and of the slight wound, was discovered.

"I thought as much," resumed Edward, still in a whisper. "See, how she has twisted this braiding of iron-wire round her arm; it is full of sharp points and edges, which have pierced the skin in twenty places. However, I will soon settle the matter now, if you will but hand me those garden-scissors that are on the chimney-piece, there, like a good girl."

Scarcely had the obnoxious circlet been thus summarily disposed of, when the patient showed the usual symptoms of returning consciousness, and the first object which she could distinctly perceive, after having recalled her scattered senses, was her own arm, uncovered nearly to the elbow, and despoiled of her golden bracelet, as well as of the sterner appendage which it had concealed. She gazed anxiously in Constance's face, and detecting something of the truth in the playfully triumphant smile which she observed there, she said, in a tone of tender yet deep reproach:

"Conny, was this kind? I never should have expected it from you."

"Don't be angry with me, dearest Cécile," replied her cousin, embracing her. "In the first place, I am not the greatest culprit, and then, it really was by a mere accident that we discovered that odious wire-work."

"It was," added Edward; "but henceforth we shall take very good care that your bracelets shall conceal no such evil secrets."

"I trust that you will not have many opportunities of thus interfering where you have no concern," answered the indignant Cécile; "but you really must excuse me; I am not fit company for any one this afternoon. Don't come with me, dear Constance, or, at all events, you must not stay with me, for I must take a little rest now, if I am to appear at all this evening."

Constance, however, would again accompany her retiring cousin, and as she did not show anew the light of her countenance below during that afternoon, her brother and St. Edmunds were left mutually to impart whatever solace or entertainment the conversation of each could afford to the other or to himself. Why, during this lengthened dialogue, the name of Miss Cécile Basinstoke, who surely might have called forth some

compassionate recollection, was not once mentioned between the two young men, we leave the intelligent reader to conjecture.

CHAPTER V.

SAINT CECILIA REPRIMANDED.

NOR even at dinner-time did the fair Constance re-appear, the alarm which Cécile had given her having been the cause or the pretext for one of those headaches to which she conceives herself subject. Singular indispositions they are, by the way, those headaches of Constance Basinstoke, shedding a fearful gloom, for the time, on the circle from which she is withdrawn, but by no means affecting either the radiant beauty or the glowing spirits of the fair sufferer. Her brother, too, being absent, in consequence of an engagement at the Thornhills', the small party was reduced to its remaining four members.

Cécile came in last, just as the dinner was announced, and her languid air clearly bespoke the painful effort that she had made to accomplish what, in Sir Charles's estimation, fell little short of a duty.

"Oh! there you are, Mademoiselle," exclaimed he, when he beheld her; "right glad am I to see you. So you have knocked up Constance, I hear, as well as yourself, by this precious expedition of yours. Now, tell me, why on earth you did not take the carriage?"

"It would have been more rational, though scarcely so interesting, perhaps," observed Lady Helen.

"Indeed, my dear uncle, the morning was so fine when I started—"

"Nonsense, nonsense," interrupted he; "we know very well what it was all about, and all I can say is, that I trust it is not to happen again. Of course, you are to go in the carriage, as go you must; but now, let's come in to dinner, as there are no hopes of our seeing dear little Conny."

Just as they were sitting down, St. Edmunds having encountered for a moment Cécile's anxious glance, she hastily raised her fore-finger to her lips, and then depressed it in the direction of her wrist; but saving this slight indication of the silence to be observed upon a somewhat delicate point before the company, no communication of a confidential character could be exchanged with her until the latter end of the evening. Then, Sir Charles having fallen fast asleep, and Lady Helen having gone up to her daughter's

room, our hero was enabled to draw near the fair Romanist, and to inquire after the wounded arm.

There was something both haughty and deprecating in the look which she cast upon him, as she coldly answered:

"I was not aware that it was generous, or gentleman-like, to allude to a secret which would never have been willingly imparted."

"Perhaps you should remember, Miss Basinstoke, before you reprove me so sternly," replied our hero, "that I might plead some peculiar right to be anxious there, where I must feel that I was myself principally to blame."

"If there was sternness or reproof in my answer," said she, somewhat softened, "you must recollect that I am occasionally obliged to enlist them into my system of self-defence."

"I was not aware that I have deserved to be reckoned among your aggressors."

"No, in truth, Lord St. Edmunds," exclaimed she, evidently moved by the tone, still more than by the words, of the speaker; "none, I mean no stranger, of course, has ever yet shown me so much—so much courtesy and forbearance, and it would be most ungrateful on my part to forget it."

"Oh! I am not at all offended," resumed he, smiling at her earnest manner; "though God knows that I have no sort of claim yet upon your consideration, saving that which the strongest sympathy and admiration might venture to urge. You need not, therefore, wear another iron bracelet for the reproof which you administered just now to my indiscretion."

"You must expect another and a severer one," said Cécile, raising her fore-finger, "if you will again intrude upon the forbidden ground."

"Don't tell me that it is forbidden, for Heaven's sake, Miss Basinstoke, as it would then be perfectly impossible for me to keep clear of it. The fact is, that there is one little question, one only, that I am dying to put to you."

"I well know what these little questions are, and in what spirit they are made, so let me advise you to set your heart upon some other object than obtaining an answer from me."

"Oh! do not refuse me, before you have even heard what I have to ask, Miss Basinstoke, or you will lose all title to the—what is it you said just now?—the 'courtesy' and 'forbearance' wasn't it? which I have condescended to show you as yet."

"The mere thought of such a penalty," observed the now smiling Cécile, "would be sufficient to insure my submission. You may state your question, providing, of course, that it has no theological bearing whatsoever."

"That is a restriction, Miss Basinstoke, which would seem to annul the concession; but, as such cannot be your intention, I shall at once avail myself of the latter. What I wish to know is, whether you really think that such self-inflicted torture as we accidentally discovered this morning can be acceptable to God?"

"And I should like to know, Lord St. Edmunds, whether you really think that such inquiries as these can be acceptable to me? I wish I could discover why it is that every most perplexing difficulty that can be raised upon religious matters is invariably here referred to me, who belong to a creed which forbids controversy no less strenuously than it enforces obedience."

"Shall I tell you why, Miss Basinstoke?"

"I wish that you would."

"Because there is something in your look, in your voice, in your manner, as well as in the few words which fall from you when we are happy enough to hear you speak, which irresistibly persuades us that you have reflected upon these subjects far more deeply than most people, and that we have all much to learn from you."

"Very well pleaded indeed, Lord St. Edmunds; but perhaps you may find, among my innumerable perfections, that I am more proof against flattery than you would suppose."

"It is not a vain compliment on my part, though you despise it, I fear, as coming from one who is but ill-qualified to form or to express similar opinions."

"Do not make me responsible, I entreat you, for any such conjectures of your own. Long before I ever saw Lord St. Edmunds, I knew that, though he wears a sword, and has been rather too much led away, as yet, by the temptations which especially beset his age, rank, and station, he has a mind fully capable of embracing all that is elevated and generous. Still, he must not be offended if I venture to tell him that the less he, too, trifles with the perilous science of theology the better."

"I am sure that you are right, Miss Cécile, when you thus so kindly and yet so cruelly reject me, as totally unworthy to converse with you upon the subject which I well know engrosses most of your thoughts. However,

you may yet be wrong in denying to me that information which I am anxious to obtain in a very different spirit, I assure you, from that which I regret to see prevailing around you here. Do you believe that I am speaking to you sincerely?"

"I do."

"And still you refuse to answer my query?"

"Well, perhaps I must relent for this once, as you seem so very solicitous to hear my oracular voice. Your question was, whether I deemed the penance of self-imposed sufferings to be acceptable to the Almighty. My answer is, that though we do not pretend to such personal and direct communion, if I may so speak, with Him, with His views, with His intentions, as others do, yet we firmly believe that He sanctions and approves whatever our Church prescribes. It might be sufficient for me, therefore, to say, that penance being authorized, and to a certain extent enforced by her, I obey her on this point as on others. I should not, however, be candidly expressing the whole of my opinion, if I did not tell you that I look to the consequences of the act more than to the mere performance of it."

"Ah! how is that?"

"Well, if you needs must know all," resumed she, scarcely suppressing a fresh smile at the earnest manner of her interrogator, "I will tell you that I find my conscience to be a fearful traitor, whose voice is seldom to be heard when that of inducement is strongest, and whom I have actually detected, more than once, pleading the very cause of the Tempter himself. Now, such a homely little stratagem as that which was discovered this morning has certainly a surprising effect in recalling the said traitor to his duty. And supposing my besetting sin to be an undue impatience of criticism, or correction, and of ridicule, twenty little spikes, well set in my arm, and whose pressure is more keenly felt at any moment of excitement, are a safer and surer warning than any which the fickle betrayer will then afford."

"Perhaps you will excuse me, Miss Basinstoke, if I ask whether the conscience may not be tutored to its duty by some more spiritual means?"

"Unquestionably these are the more refined and the more exalted; but, in my case, I believe a combination of both to be the most effective, particularly under present circumstances."

"Under present circumstances!" observed St. Edmunds. "Ah! I suppose that you have been more frequently tempted than usual of late, and I do wish that you could, in this season of religious contention, resort to some milder specific."

"I have two others which are called into play before that one which you seem so much to dread."

"May I not know what they are?"

"You may. The first is to look upon this," said she, pointing to a miniature crucifix in ebony affixed to one of her rings. "When I reflect upon the sufferings of which this is the symbol; when I remember that Jeanne d'Arc required no other indulgence, in the extremity of mortal agony, than to gaze upon the rude counterfeit of that sign, well may I, or rather might I, cheerfully bear the few and slight annoyances which may fall to my lot."

"And yet the resource is sometimes unavailing?"

"It is, to my shame."

"And then you have another in store before you resort to the bracelet."

"I have. Sometimes it seems to me that the spirit, when it is goaded overmuch, will escape from its present thralldom and fly into its exalted communion with all the great, the glorious, the ever-blessed who have shared its creed and its hopes. I think upon the scaffold of More, upon the last cry of Pascal, upon the death-bed of Napoleon, and I ask who and what those revilers are who pretend to sit in judgment upon such as they. But see, we are disturbing, as well we may, the slumbers of Sir Charles, and it is time that we change the forbidden subject."

"Eh! oh! how is it!" exclaimed the waking Baronet, "I haven't been asleep, have I, nephew? What has become of Lady Helen?"

The latter question was responded to almost as soon as uttered by the re-appearance of the mistress of the house, who, moving up to her husband, asked him if he were ready for the family prayers, which, on Sunday evenings, he was in the excellent habit of reading to the assembled household. The answer having been given in the affirmative, Lady Helen apprized her nephew, and then, turning to Cécile, said:

"You too, will come, of course, as usual."

"Very well, Lady Helen," replied she, and the small party adjourned together to the entrance hall, where the domestics were al-

ready congregated, in the neighbourhood of a blazing fire.

When the homely service began Cécile knelt with all around her, and seemed no less devoutly engaged than they were while the ordinary prayers were recited; but a new one having been introduced by Sir Charles, composed on that very morning, by himself, and alluding, in not very guarded terms, to the presumed designs and errors of the Papal See, she arose as noiselessly as could be, and gently resumed her seat. There was one person present who was not so completely absorbed, however, in the pious exercise of the moment as not to remark this change of attitude, and that person was, unfortunately, Lady Helen herself.

When the devotions were concluded, she approached Sir Charles, whispered a few words in his ear, and, having obtained from him an apparently not very willing assent, she drew nearer to the unconscious delinquent and said, in a peculiarly clear and audible voice:

"I thought that when you had obtained leave from your confessor to assist at our prayers, it was with a view of joining in them yourself, or that we might at least expect such outward signs of reverence as the occasion calls for."

"Certainly, Lady Helen."

"And do you conceive, may I ask you, that you are acting in accordance with any such feeling by ostentatiously declining, as you have done just now, to share in our devotions?"

"You must be aware, Lady Helen," replied Cécile, in a deprecating tone, "that I had a strong and very evident reason for not concurring in everything Sir Charles said this evening, whereby I trust that I can have given offence to no one."

"But you have given offence to me and to all true Protestants present—"

"I beg your pardon, Lady Helen," interposed Cécile, timidly glancing at the servants, who were still lingering near the opposite doorway, arrested by the unusual character of the conversation, "I beg your pardon, but surely this is scarcely the time or the place—"

"Don't presume to dictate to me in my own house, pray. This is precisely the time and the place, and I am very glad that those who may have noticed your conduct to-night should hear me tell you, that I consider it impertinent in the extreme."

"That will do, I think, my dear," whispered Sir Charles, who from the first had seemed somewhat doubtful as to the expediency of his wife's present sortie; "and now, my good friends," added he, addressing his domestics in a louder voice, "you may retire."

"I am very glad that they should have seen how far I, at least, am converted as yet," responded Lady Helen, "and how I for one am prepared to deal with every insult to our faith and sentiments, whether it proceed from Pope or from Papist."

Poor Cécile! We trust that the recollection of Napoleon, and of Charlemagne, and of Jeanne d'Arc may have been sufficient to sustain her internal equanimity during this little ordeal; but observing how her dark eye kindled, and how convulsive was the tremor that ran through her whole frame, St. Edmunds could not but fear that her specifics were again failing her at the hour of her utmost need. As yet, the whole occurrence had been so unforeseen, and so rapid, that he had been unable to give any utterance to the feelings which it had aroused within him; but now he could not refrain from exclaiming:

"My dear Sir Charles, do you think that it was very necessary to say all that you said just now in the presence of a Catholic, whom it must have offended and wounded?"

"You will find nothing ever said in this house, which can wound or offend true Catholics, St. Edmunds," interposed the still excited Lady Helen; "and this, for the simple reason that we are all such here, I trust."

"Well, but my dear aunt, you said that we were Protestants just now, and I wish that I could understand, once for all, how we can be both at the self-same time."

"I will explain it to you in two words, if you wish to know it, St. Edmunds. We are a Protestant nation, as protesting, for ever, I trust, against the fallacy and corruptions of the Romish creed, and we are Catholics as belonging to the Universal Church of Christ. Any one, I should think, can understand that."

"I shall endeavour to, for my part," answered St. Edmunds, anxious, above all, to allay the irritation of all parties; "and I shall much rejoice to believe that Miss Basinstoke can no longer reject me as a heretic, when I am included under the same denomination as herself."

"Ah!" replied Cécile, "I fear that it is the mere mockery of language to unite, under such forced application of the same expressions, those who are so grievously estranged."

"I am very much obliged to you for the compliment," retorted the mistress of the house.

"Indeed, Lady Helen, I had intended addressing neither compliment nor criticism to you personally, and was only answering Lord St. Edmunds's observation."

"So you will not allow our National Church to be Catholic as well as Protestant?" added he.

"I do not presume to allow or to forbid anything," replied Cécile smiling; "but it certainly does appear to me, that Catholic and National are, as Edward would say, correlative and antagonistic terms, which cannot be sincerely confounded or easily reconciled."

"I am for reconciling off to bed," exclaimed the Baronet. "I cannot make out how it is, but I never saw two people yet talking together upon religious matters without falling out. Ah! you need not look so very knowing, Miss Cécile; it is a positive fact."

"If my looks conveyed anything, Sir Charles, it must have been unqualified assent to the very Catholic sentiment which you were uttering."

"Never mind my sentiments, but take care how you misbehave again at our prayers," said her uncle, playfully pulling one of her silken curls, "or you will get such a wiggling as never you had yet. Now, good-night to you all; I see that the glass is going up again, nephew; so that, please God, we shall be able to show you some pheasants to-morrow."

CHAPTER VI.

THE DYING PHEASANT.

THE worthy Baronet was as good as his word, for, on the following day, our hero found the home cover more plentifully stocked than he could have expected, and such justice was done to the sport by himself, his uncle, and his cousin, that old Waddinghead, the keeper, vowed that it was the smartest shooting he had ever beheld.

Late in the afternoon, when the general thirst for carnage was somewhat abated, an unforeseen but most welcome diversion was afforded by the appearance of Constance and Cécile, who, on their return from a long walk, had, accidentally no doubt, strayed in the di-

rection of the guns. After a momentary interruption of the proceedings, the new comers so strongly expressed their desire not to interfere with any previous arrangements, that the beaters returned to their task and afforded the sportsmen an opportunity of exhibiting their skill before their fair visitants.

"Are you a good shot, St. Edmunds?" asked Constance of her cousin.

"Only pretty fair," replied he; "not so good as Edward."

"Can you shoot the birds right and left in the way he does?"

"Well, I have done such a thing. Look here, there are two getting up together now; one is a hen, but never mind. When they are straight over my head, I will fire."

The young Viscount deliberately watched the moment for a double *coup du roi*, and then discharged either barrel to such good purpose, that both the birds fell almost perpendicularly to his feet.

"That is wonderful," cried Constance; "I only hope that the unfortunate creatures are quite dead."

"The cock is, at all events," answered St. Edmunds, as he glanced towards the gaudier victim, while re-loading his gun.

"Yes," observed Cécile; "but I fear the little hen is not. See, Conny, she is fluttering still."

"Oh! so she is, Cécile. It is a shocking sight! I cannot bear to look upon it."

"It is in truth, and yet it arrests the eye. Poor little modest housewife, continued Cécile, in a low musing tone, "thy homely garb might well have protected thee from the fate of thy chivalrous lord! I do not know how it is, Conny, but I am less moved by the aspect of the torn and mangled limbs, beautifully and intricately fashioned as they are, than by the thought that a life—a distinct, animated, sentient existence, is even now flitting before our eyes. See, there is the last convulsive struggle!—now, all is ended."

"Poor little animal," cried Constance, "how I wish she were alive again!"

"Ah!" resumed Cécile, "Will Kings, or Councils, or Parliaments restore for one brief hour that priceless gift which the ruthless shot has destroyed?—What say you, Conny? Perhaps this is the same poor little lady who, in January last, used to hang about the windows of the library, and so tremulously pick up the crumbs of bread we would throw to her. Do you remember how we

discovered her afterwards so carefully preparing her lonely nest in the shrubbery. Twice we fell in with the young unfledged brood. How anxiously she watched over them; with what unwearied solicitude she provided for all their wants, and defended them from every peril, until the wholesixteen could sally out, in noble array, around their exulting parent! I do not know how it is, but I do not think that I should much like shooting."

"What's the row?" exclaimed the Baronet, who with his son had drawn close to the unconscious speaker. "Has anything happened?"

"Oh! it is only Saint Cecilia moralizing upon the death of a pheasant," observed Edward.

"That girl will die in a mad-house, upon my word, she will," remarked Sir Charles, in a tone of the deepest conviction.

"Nothing more probable," said Cécile, scarcely recovered from her alarm on perceiving that her half-uttered thoughts had found so many listeners.

"Well, but I shall have to join you there some day or other," resumed Edward, "if to be strangely arrested by such a sight is any indication that so fearful a goal is to be the term of our course. Shall I tell you what often strikes me when I witness the gradual extinction of any life, however humble, in the order of Creation?"

"No, pray do not," cried his smiling cousin; "I am sure that it is some dreadful induction of your German rationalism, which may full as well remain untold and unheard."

"Come, come," resumed Edward, observing that his father and Constance had moved on, "I cannot allow my thoughts to be put to the Index before they are spoken. Did you ever reflect, Saint Cecilia, when you have chanced to watch, as now, the conscious, animated, immaterial spirit forsaking the frail form of one of these little beings, what close kindred that spirit might claim to our own?"

"I have, Edward, and not without some feeling of awe."

"Have you ever remembered, then, that since the spiritual nature of the soul is invoked as the principal earnest of its separate and immortal existence, we should either concede some such independent vitality to that intricate assemblage of immaterial faculties which constitute what we, in our

ephemeral pride, call the instinct of animals ; or else, we must resign ourselves to some such futurity as we attribute—”

“ Enough, enough, Edward,” cried his cousin. “ I had well guessed what the conclusion was to be, and am sorry that I listened even so far.”

“ What, Saint Cecilia ! are you a doctor in Israel and will not dare to look that truth in the face, which is inscribed in each phrase of Nature’s ever open volume ?”

“ I have not feared more than yourself, Edward, to read in that volume, though I am not a doctor in Israel, and the lesson which it has taught me is far different from that which I am afraid you have learned, not there but elsewhere. I have seen, not in every phrase, but at every line, at every word, the evidences of that Great Being, inscrutable in his nature, still more inscrutable to us in his designs, yet whose presence the arch-priest of your faith, if you have one, has pronounced it absolutely necessary to imagine in the order of nature, were it not so distinctly revealed.”

“ Well, but Cécile, if Voltaire is your authority, you should abide by his conclusions upon other points as well as that one. When such as he have averred, that they hesitate in attributing to our destiny so immeasurable a superiority over that of those countless and also highly gifted living creatures who sport for an hour with us on the face of the creation, and then are seen no more—perhaps we might pause likewise.”

“ But I cannot, I will not pause,” cried the ardent Cécile, “ when a thousand voices within me and around me are urging me onward to a far different conviction. I love and admire, as much as you can, the exterior marvels of the creation, and more particularly those humbler children of nature, so many of whom are destined to be our cherished companions and followers here below. I could not for a moment entertain the fearful delusion that my responsibility and my vocation are no other than theirs. I see the presence of an all-creating all-regulating God, attested, as it is required, by each obedient detail of the universal mechanism ; but it is my heart that proclaims my communion with Him—that heart which, as a greater than Voltaire has said, has its own reasons, which reason cannot fathom, and which, believe me, Edward, she cannot overthrow.”

“ Are you quite sure though, Cécile, that

your friend Pascal is a much greater believer than I am ?”

“ Quite sure, Edward. We know that, in mere mockery, he resigned himself to the guidance of reason until, appalled at the still trackless expanse ever opening before her, the wearied and perplexed leader resigned her hopeless task ; then he raised his eyes and pointed to the glorious light which was shining above. From that hour, all was clear, all was revealed. Oh ! Edward, will that light never shine upon you ?”

“ It has, it does, through your eyes, Cécile,” replied he, in a lower and deeper tone.

She resolutely met his ardent glance and said, in a voice of soft but somewhat haughty reproach :—

“ I did not require, Edward, this crowning proof that such conversations are more perilous still than useless. You will not easily, I trust, induce me to resume them again.”

Where was our hero, while this animated dialogue was thus rapidly progressing to its ominous conclusion ? All had reached him saving Edward’s last half-whispered observation, and not one single word had failed to arrest, we might almost say to entrance, his attention. He had never heard aught like it at the Coventry House Club, though the conversation there has been pronounced to be, upon a general average, decidedly superior to that which prevails at its rival assemblages ; and, on that very account, perhaps, he was strangely led away by the spirit of the discourse. It spoke to a thousand slumbering feelings and faculties, whose voices had cheered and inspired him during many a bright hour, ere the study of all the treasures of the past had been abruptly relinquished, not many years since, for the ardent pursuits of the present. Edward Basinstoke, his school companion of those days, had correctly informed Cécile when he had told her that, though deficient in all the more recent acquirements of a duly finished education, his cousin’s mind was gifted far above the ordinary par. Having stated so much, in deference to the truth, we will only add now, for the correct information of our hapless reader, should we be so fortunate as to secure one, that though St. Edmunds took no share in the philosophical discussion above alluded to, Kant himself could scarcely have found a more intelligent or more reverential listener.

On that very evening there was a great dinner party at the hall, comprising, among other neighbours, the whole Thornhill fa-

mily, and some friends who were on a visit to them. Many of these being naturally ignorant of Cécile's religious persuasion, it was not surprising that they should introduce the leading topic of the day, or that so exciting a subject, when once mooted, should have become the theme of the general discourse. The manifold deceptions of the Church of Rome, and, still more, the inconceivable ignorance, blindness, and superstition of her followers were set forth in terms so glowing as to make it perfectly marvellous that numerous, and, in other respects, enlightened communities should still be enthralled by such gross impostures. Much consolation was afforded, however, by the anticipation that the ensuing day, being no other than the memorable fifth of November, a demonstration would be called forth from the people of England, so general and, at the same time, so exalted in its nature, as to cast upon the whole of Christendom a lustre which would dispel, if any thing could, the darkness in which an essential portion of it still lies enshrouded. While such was the tone and purport of the observations freely exchanged around her, St. Edmunds could not resist casting occasionally a glance at Cécile; once or twice he detected her secretly pressing to her lips her little crucifix ring; but, upon the whole, her countenance and bearing were such as to lead him to trust that this resource might prove sufficient for the hour.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIFTH OF NOVEMBER.

THE hopeful expectations of the less sanguine amongst Sir Charles Basinstoke's guests were, upon the whole, we believe, tolerably well satisfied, in the eventful morrow. We, for our part, must avow that we were somewhat disappointed, the popular demonstration having been decidedly inferior both to that which was enacted at Rome on the preceding year, and also to another which took place at Aleppo about the same time. Still, when we consider the prodigious number of Christian prelates and dignitaries who were, on this occasion, promenaded and burnt in effigy, and the probable amount of annoyance and vexation which many millions of British subjects, who are accustomed to regard with a certain degree of reverence the persons and office of the imaginary victims must, say what they will, have experienced, we are free to admit that, after all, the exhibition was a very creditable one.

As we are bound to be precise and truthful in our narrative, we must state that our hero, without positively declining to accompany Sir Charles to Glanford, there to witness and to stimulate the intended proceedings, expressed so keen a desire again to pursue some partridges which had baffled his utmost skill on the previous occasion, that he was finally committed to the care of Mr. Waddinghead. Whether or not this esteemed functionary was more than once surprised at the languid and listless bearing of the young nobleman, we will not undertake to aver. However, as, in the end, the bag was a tolerably heavy one, the two parties returned homewards in terms of mutual and most cordial good humour.

"I beg your pardon, my Lord," said Mr. Waddinghead, "but you will find the short cut across the fields the pleasantest way to the hall."

"Indeed, Waddinghead? It looks confoundedly swampy."

"Well, it is rather moist, my Lord, but then I am afraid you will find some bad characters on the road. There would seem to be a general holiday of them to-day, all a flocking in to Glanford from all parts to see the Pope burnt."

"But they won't burn us with him, will they, Waddinghead?"

"I don't say that they would, at all, my Lord," replied the keeper, with a broad grin; "but, with your leave, some of them are very possibly by this time pretty strong in liquor, and, as they are come out for a lark, there is no saying what they may turn their hands to."

"Very good, Waddinghead," answered our hero, who was by habit, still more than by nature, far too indolent ever to seek out difficulty and danger, "I will be regulated by your opinion, so lead the way. I suppose that you will go into Glanford to-night to see the fireworks?"

"May be I shall, my Lord, that is, if I can persuade Missus and daughter to stay at home, for it won't be any fit place for them?"

"Yet I should think that they would like to see the Pope roasted too, wouldn't they?"

"That you may be certain they would, my Lord, as he deserves to be, for not recognising our Queen, and objecting to deal with her as one Sovereign should with another."

By this time St. Edmunds and his companion had reached Mrs. Hawthorne's house, where it may not have been forgotten that,

on a previous occasion, they had committed their wounded dog to the care of the village beauty; and great was the surprise of both when they beheld, on the threshold, Miss Cécile Basinstoke herself.

"There's a young lady by your leave, my Lord," whispered the cautious Waddinghead, "who might full as well be at home as abroad this evening."

Without giving any utterance to his concurrence in this sentiment, the young Viscount moved forward towards Miss Basinstoke, but he was suddenly arrested on observing the unusual paleness of her face, and the deep anxiety which her whole countenance expressed.

"You must be astonished to see me here," said she, "and think me sadly rebellious, but I am come on an errand which brooks neither denial nor delay."

"Indeed! Is that poor girl worse?"

"The end is even now at hand, and he who alone can impart courage and consolation is not come. This is truly awful."

"Miss Basinstoke," resumed St. Edmunds earnestly, "I trust that you will command my services, and believe that I should be too happy could they be of any avail."

"I am most grateful indeed, Lord St. Edmunds, but I have already dispatched a safe and speedy messenger."

"At all events, I hope that you will allow me to remain with you here, until I can see you safe home. I hear that there are many persons about, whom it would not be well that you should meet alone at so late an hour."

"Indeed," answered Cécile somewhat embarrassed, "I really cannot think that any one would molest me, and you had better, much better, leave me and return at once to the hall."

Ere our hero had had time to urge anew his request, Miss Basinstoke's eyes had strayed in another direction, and she exclaimed, in a tone of the deepest regret:

"Gracious Heaven! how unfortunate! there is Mr. Lewis! It is what I most feared."

The person thus alluded to was a young man of grave and prepossessing appearance, whose look and dress clearly bespoke his holy vocation, and who was approaching the humble cottage with hasty steps.

"Did you send for Mr. Lewis, Mrs. Hawthorne?" anxiously inquired Cécile of the tall ungainly matron, in whom our hero had already detected, on a former occasion, the very personification of a step-mother,

"I did, Miss Cécile, as well I might, I should say," was the ready reply.

"I am very sorry to hear it; she will not see him, you know."

"She will see him, Miss Cécile, if she's let alone."

"I understand what you mean, Mrs. Hawthorne. Perhaps you had better speak to her yourself, and ascertain what her feelings are, for it would be most unfortunate that anything should occur which could grieve or offend Mr. Lewis."

Thus urged, Mrs. Hawthorne proceeded, as gently as was consistent with her nature, into the neighbouring room; but within a few seconds the plaintive and agitated voice of the sufferer was heard calling for Miss Basinstoke. Cécile did not respond to the anxious summons until it had been several times renewed; she then followed upon Mrs. Hawthorne's footsteps, and inquired of the ill-fated girl what she desired.

"Oh, Miss Basinstoke, Miss Basinstoke!" muttered the latter, "Mr. Lewis is here, and you know that I cannot—that I will not see him! Pray tell him so, and also tell him why—but don't let him come in; I have not strength, I really have not!" and, with an hysterical sob, poor Mabel's head fell back upon her pillow.

Cécile whispered a few words of acquiescence and of consolation in her ear, and then hastened to the door of the room, just in time to arrest the entrance of the young clergyman.

"Miss Basinstoke!" cried he, partly divining her purpose, "you are here on a fearful errand."

"Say, rather, on a very painful duty, Mr. Lewis, but one that must be performed. I have a word for your private ear."

He followed her into a lonely corner of the small room, and she then resumed:

"Read this letter, which I received this morning, painfully traced in secret, by the dying hand of that poor girl. It is my excuse for being here contrary to Lady Helen's positive injunctions; it will be yours, if you require one, for not adding fresh bitterness, in this hour, to a cup which is already overflowing."

Mr. Lewis took the letter, and, having attentively perused it, gravely replied:

"I see strong evidence here, Miss Basinstoke, that, as I much apprehended, this truly unfortunate young woman's mind is lamentably unsettled upon the all-important subject of her religious creed; and this can but be

an additional incentive for me to persevere in my mission."

"Her mind is not unsettled, Mr. Lewis," firmly answered Cécile; "it is resolutely, irrevocably fixed, as you will see, if you read again. You would but perplex and harass her last hour. In the name of the all-merciful Being whom we both worship, proceed no further!"

"My dear Miss Basinstoke," replied he, "while giving you credit for the very best intentions, I must tell you that such objections as you have just raised are very frequently urged upon us in similar cases, and must be as often overruled."

"You misunderstand me, Mr. Lewis. This is no ordinary case of human infirmity on the verge of dissolution. He whose presence alone is expected and desired has been sent for, and is, I trust, even now at hand; while you, Mr. Lewis, with all respect for your character and truly christian virtues, she dreads above all things upon earth to encounter."

"How can that be?" muttered he, much perplexed at the earnest tone of the speaker.

"I will tell you," resumed Cécile, in a low voice, "for this is no time for vain compliments. Poor Mabel holds you to be responsible in part, though God knows most unconsciously, for her misfortunes and her—her fall."

"Gracious Heaven, Miss Basinstoke! what can you mean?"

"Do you remember her having pressingly and repeatedly requested your permission to see you in private, and at your own house?"

"I do remember it, and also having willingly assented, provided there were any sufficient motive."

"And do you recollect what occurred, when at length she took courage and went to you?"

"No, not exactly," said Mr. Lewis, in a tone of the deepest sincerity.

"Well," resumed Cécile, "she has told me that, on that day, she was, after some hesitation, admitted into your presence. She found you, not alone, but with another person, older than yourself, and to all appearance an Anglican clergyman likewise. Greatly overawed, she attempted to explain that it was you alone whom she wished to meet, upon which your companion exclaimed: 'Hollo, young man, no auricular confession going on in this district, I trust!' or something to that effect. Do you remember now, Mr. Lewis?"

"I have some recollection, but faint enough, as of an incident to which no importance was attached at the time. Pray continue to relate what may have been this poor girl's impression, and—and yours."

"She thought that you seemed rather startled and annoyed, and, feeling herself still more embarrassed than before, she withdrew, saying that she would come again, but she never returned. On that day, Mr. Lewis, she would have revealed to you the fatal secret of her heart; she would have told you how the betrayer, the destroyer's words were instilling their subtle poison into her soul, and subduing more and more all power of resistance; she would have intreated you to intercede with him, that he should renounce his fatal pursuit, or impart to it an honourable character. She believes that one word from you might have sustained her, or arrested him; but it was otherwise decreed."

"It is a sad and most unfortunate occurrence indeed, Miss Basinstoke," replied Mr. Lewis, evidently somewhat moved; "but you must excuse me for saying that it militates altogether in favour of the course which I am about to pursue. I am here not only through my own impulse and sense of duty, but in consequence of a pressing message from this unfortunate girl's nearest relative, and I must proceed. Mrs. Hawthorne," continued he, addressing the matron, who, with a jealous eye, was scrutinizing the two speakers from the further extremity of the room, "Mrs. Hawthorne, shall I attend you?"

"Indeed, Mr. Lewis," answered she, "I think that there is no more time to be lost."

"You will remember how earnestly I have warned you both," resumed Cécile calmly; and, without offering any additional opposition, she moved towards the outer door of the cottage, thereagain to breathe the external air.

In a moment St. Edmunds was at her side, but so absorbed did she seem by her own agitated reflections, that he did not venture to address her, until, suddenly fixing her eyes full upon him, she said:

"Perhaps, it is well that there should be an impartial witness like yourself to what has occurred, and may still occur here. I fear that I shall be called to an awful account for what I have felt it incumbent upon me to do, but my support will come from above."

Ere our hero could offer any reply, the attention of both was painfully arrested by the sound of faint but oft-repeated shrieks, proceeding from the sick-chamber within.

"I had dreaded as much," rejoined Cécile, responding to the anxiously inquiring look of her companion. "The poor girl's mind is fearfully excited and enfeebled, and they are trying her beyond her powers of endurance. Holy Virgin, what shall I do?"

"Do, Miss Basinstoke? Cannot you hear that she is calling to you? Surely you will go to her."

"I ought—I must—and you shall accompany me."

"I, Miss Basinstoke?" replied our hero, a little startled.

"Yes, you, Lord St. Edmunds," added she, in a low but strangely animated voice, "since Heaven itself appears to have ordained that you should witness this death-bed. Be not afraid. You know that:

"'Tis but a pang, and then a thrill,
And then an end of human ill."

And yet, when he entered the humble chamber of death, our hero, who was entirely new to such scenes, felt himself awe-stricken in the extreme. There, reclining upon the lowly couch which she was never again to leave, lay the still-comely maiden whose appearance and manners had so deeply interested him, even before her sad tale had been disclosed. On the further side stood the village apothecary and nurse, retained by Cécile herself, and endeavouring to conceal the appalling symptoms which the broken blood-vessel was almost momentarily revealing; on the other side, nearer to the door, Mr. Lewis and Mrs. Hawthorne were respectively endeavouring, he to soothe, and she to subdue, the fitful agitation of the sufferer.

"Surely you won't die as you lived, rejecting the Holy Word of God?" muttered the unrelenting step-mother.

"Oh! don't speak to me so," cried the death-stricken girl, "you will kill me before my time. Miss Basinstoke, dear Miss Cécile, you pure angel of light, for the love of Heaven, you must not forsake me. You know all I wish, all I hope, all I ask; do persuade them to torture me no more. I cannot bear it, I really cannot," and, with a low moaning cry, she resigned her head in the nurse's arms.

"This is dangerous work," whispered the apothecary: "here is the blood flowing again."

"Are you not persuaded yet, Mr. Lewis?" inquired Cécile, not without a slight accent of asperity.

"I am convinced, Miss Basinstoke," answered he, "that now I may not attempt more. You told me, I believe, that you had sent for Father Athanasius. I can wait in the next room till he comes; do you in the meanwhile stay with this unhappy sufferer, who certainly appears to derive from your society a solace which I may not impart. Come with me, pray, Mrs. Hawthorne."

"Thank you, Mr. Lewis; I had expected as much from you," whispered Cécile, gratefully laying her hand on that of the retiring clergyman.

St. Edmunds now approached the apothecary, and, drawing him aside, anxiously interrogated him as to the true condition of the patient, and the degree of hope which might still be entertained. The answers were as ominous as could well have been conceived, a few short hours more of existence being the utmost range assigned to the fast-failing powers of vitality. The information elicited from the worthy Mr. Bolus was not, however, confined to this mere summary of the case. Impelled by the genuine spirit of his art, he enlarged upon each detail, symptom, and incident of the crisis with such technical zeal and fluency, that our hero's mind would no doubt have been considerably enlightened upon a subject somewhat novel to him as yet, had he been an attentive listener; but we have some reasons for conjecturing that the conversation with the diffuse practitioner was ultimately used, if it had not been originally resorted to, as a pretext for remaining present at a scene which had awakened no inconsiderable interest.

And, in truth, what he then beheld was well calculated, from more motives than one, to arrest his passing attention. Cécile had sat down upon the bed, close to the pillow of the sufferer, and, supporting in her arms the drooping head of poor Mabel, was whispering, with the tenderness of a sister, each word of consolation which the feelings that absorbed her could suggest.

"Is there no hope whatever left?" inquired the dying girl, not for the first time, alas! since she had been laid there on the previous day.

"There is always hope, Mabel, so long as God grants life; and, when life is withdrawn, then another and far brighter hope than it could ever realize dawns upon our souls. Think how blessed the reflection, that all human suffering is at an end, and that your portion may soon be with the saints

who surround, in eternal bliss, the throne of the Almighty."

"Ah! Miss Cécile, remember what a life mine has been, and how grievously I have sinned."

"We have all sinned, Mabel, and it is as sinners—as sinners alone—that we have been redeemed. What does this blessed symbol testify, unless the price paid for the sins of mankind?"

"And you think that I too shall be forgiven?"

"He to whom power from above has been granted to convey that joyful assurance may alone impart it, and he will soon be here. In the meanwhile, think not of this vain fleeting world, but of that glorious abode where the voice of the scorner and of the reviler will no more be heard. See, the heavens are opening before you. Each holy saint and exalted martyr among the countless host of the eternally happy is smiling his celestial welcome to you. Why would you delay on this cold heartless earth, when regions of such ineffable brightness are awaiting you? At the right hand of the All-Powerful, the Mediator is standing, clothed in the radiance of the Godhead; to Him we may appeal, who said, that there would be joy in Heaven over one sinner that repented. But we have another intercessor there, one to whom none of our womanly feelings, or sorrows, or frailties are unknown. Often has She seen you, Mabel, kneeling to her in secret; now She will acknowledge and claim you as her own, before the whole array of the immortally blessed."

The low soothing tones of the speaker were hushed for a moment, but then the supplicating voice of the sufferer was heard, as she feebly uttered:

"Oh! do not pause, Miss Cécile. As you speak to me thus, I think that I discern all you point out; when you are silent, the vision is withdrawn. With you at my side, I could hope all things and fear nothing. Why must we part?"

"Would indeed," resumed Cécile, "that I were lying, in truth, by you on this lowly couch; that my race too was run, that my crown also was gained, and that nought but the short transit which is awaiting you lay between me and all that my eyes have most longed to witness! Would that I could behold, so soon as you will, the sacred figure of our Holy Church, no longer militant in this world of grief, no longer suffering in the

dread ordeal of celestial wrath, but triumphant for ever in her appointed glory. Would that I were worthy and ready as you are to receive that last and most blessed of all her sacraments, that final earnest that she has power to loose as well as power to bind, and that the keys of Heaven have not, in vain, been committed to her keeping. Kings and Princes, Pontiffs and Saints, have longed with the whole powers of their soul for that hour which is now dawning upon you; truly I could weep, Mabel, not for you who are called, but for myself who am not yet counted worthy to follow."

Thus did the anxious Cécile endeavour to minister to poor Mabel Hawthorne's last earthly sufferings, and to dispel the terrors which were closing fast upon her death-bed. For some time longer was the whispered dialogue continued, but in tones so low as to render it inaudible to all around; and then, either through physical debility or by the virtue of some inward consolation duly received, the fitful excitement of the dying girl subsided into a serener mood. Miss Basinstoke, who was herself well-nigh exhausted, was now prevailed upon by the nurse to retire for a few minutes into the fresher atmosphere of the adjoining room, and St. Edmunds took the same opportunity of noiselessly withdrawing from the sick-chamber. He allowed, however, a few minutes to elapse before he would interrupt the silent course of her solemn reflections.

"It must be a great satisfaction to you, Miss Basinstoke," he then whispered, "to witness the success of your efforts to calm and soothe in this awful hour."

"It is indeed an awful hour," replied Cécile, "and struggle, and hope, and believe as we may, it is a longing lingering look still that will be cast behind. Perhaps you have never assisted at a death-bed before?"

"Never."

"It is a scene which reveals much that nothing else in life will disclose."

"I have, in truth, learnt much to-day, Miss Basinstoke, and never as yet has it so forcibly occurred to me that death may well be the beginning rather than the end."

"Ah!" exclaimed Cécile, fixing her inspired eye full upon the countenance of the youthful speaker, "tell that to Edward when next you meet him, and ask him how it is that the nearer the final goal is approached, the more boundless will show the expanse beyond it. What do you think would have

been the response of that poor girl's native and untaught impulse, if I had attempted to persuade her just now that death was the dissolution of all."

Another interval of silence ensued, and it was again broken by our hero.

"You spoke with marvellous authority, Miss Basinstoke."

"Authority?" replied she, "no, not with authority, but perhaps with the sincerity of faith. Would you require yonder sufferer to pronounce, with those mental faculties now on the very verge of extinction, whether Calvin be more orthodox than Arminius, or Socinus less clearly borne out than Luther by the more plausible interpretation of the text? Would it be a great consolation for her now to learn, that her creed has been cunningly shaped and fashioned to the prejudices and passions of a nation, or will she not rather call for that visible sacrament which embodies the uncompromising tradition of Catholic belief?"

"There is doubtless much, very much, in what you say, Miss Basinstoke; and still I am sure that you will excuse me for observing that solace might also be derived from hearing, at such a moment, some of the more appropriate passages of Holy Writ."

"No doubt," responded Cécile, "and, though my heart might fail me whilst making the dread selection, I should not until now have deferred the performance of that duty, had I deemed that no other ministration than mine would be granted. But stay, I think I hear the sound of an approaching horse without. It is, it must be he!" exclaimed she, fervently clasping her hands; "oh! this is a mercy indeed!"

Cécile was not mistaken; within a few minutes the tall figure of the long-expected Father Athanasius darkened the narrow threshold of the cottage. There Miss Basinstoke met him, and at once, seizing his proffered hand, conducted him first to the corner of the room, where Mr. Lewis had been patiently awaiting his arrival. The greeting exchanged between the two churchmen, though distant and reserved, was by no means uncourteous. Both had been members, first of the same university, then of the same Church, and if there was something more stern and compressed in the manner and countenance of the Romish priest, perhaps this might be partly accounted for as the consequence of the altered bearing towards him, since his secession, of many of

his former friends and associates. The conference was an earnest but very short one, after which Mr. Lewis retired, and Father Athanasius proceeded, with Cécile, towards the sick-chamber. At the door she paused, and after having exchanged a few words with her confessor, she turned towards St. Edmunds and said to him:

"You can come with us, if you please, but I presume that you would rather not."

Our hero, though somewhat perplexed, finally assented to the latter view, and every one else having fully shared his scruples, with the exception of Mr. Bolus, who thought it his duty not to leave the death-bed, the last solemn ceremony was performed with no other witnesses than he and Cécile.

At the end of about a quarter of an hour, Miss Basinstoke re-appeared, and requested Mrs. Hawthorne's attendance. The door having remained open behind them, St. Edmunds could see the priest raising poor Mabel in her bed, that she might embrace her step-mother, after which the death-stricken form was suffered to relapse into its former position; but soon the nurse was anxiously summoned. As she passed the door, she gently closed it, and for the space of about ten minutes no further tidings from within reached the outer room. Then Mrs. Hawthorne re-issued first, pressing her handkerchief to her eyes; then Cécile followed, looking very pale, but perfectly composed, and then Mr. Bolus himself, with his great coat on, and his hat in his hand.

"She went off much more quietly than I expected," said the latter.

Cécile nodded a silent assent.

"I suppose that I can be of no further use?"

"Thank you very much, Mr. Bolus," answered she; "but I should think not."

A few minutes of silence succeeded his departure, after which our hero drew near Miss Basinstoke, and said:

"You seem much fatigued, Miss Cécile; I trust that your painful task here is now accomplished."

"It is," said she. "I have one word more to say to the nurse, and then I shall be quite ready to return home."

She again withdrew for an instant, but when, on re-entering the outer room, she encountered St. Edmunds, she paused for a moment, coloured slightly, and then whispered to him, not without some hesitation:

"I should almost wish you to see how calmly the sufferer sleeps now."

He followed her to the all-stirless couch, by which the priest alone was still kneeling. The rapture of repose was there, indeed!

"Death, that knows all, can have told her no tale of fear," muttered Cécile.

"No, in truth."

CHAPTER VIII.

A STIRRING SCENE.

THOUGH the little drama which had thus been enacted was, so far as its leading features were concerned, of anything but unfrequent occurrence, it had sufficiently engrossed the attention of all the witnesses to make them utterly unmindful, for the time, of what might be taking place without. St. Edmunds had observed, it is true, when he had last approached the outer door, that several persons, principally of the more communicative sex, were assembling there in earnest consultation. This circumstance however might, as he judged, be attributable merely to the interest which so sad and early a fate as poor Mabel's could not but awaken among her neighbours and associates; a surmise which, though very plausible, was not altogether correct.

It is by no means our purpose to attempt offering some explanation of our own for the long-studied phenomenon of the marvellous rapidity with which evil tidings will be borne, independently, it would appear, of any direct human agency. We, therefore, need not endeavour to illustrate how it was, that while Mrs. Hawthorne was perfectly convinced of having mentioned to no one, saving to Mrs. Cranberry, the fact that owing, as she conceived, to Miss Cécile Basinstoke's influence, Mabel had rejected the offices of Mr. Lewis, and while Mrs. Cranberry was equally confident of having whispered the same merely to her husband and daughter, the said intelligence had, almost immediately, reached, not only every house in the village, but many which were not included in its precincts. Mr. Lewis was generally much respected and beloved by his parishioners; the notion that he had met with any slight or indignity would, in all seasons no doubt, have called forth an universal expression of their reprobation and resentment; but, on the present day, so especially consecrated to Protestant festivity, these feelings proved to be peculiarly fervent and expansive. Many persons at first could not credit the statement; but when induced by others to draw near to Mrs. Hawthorne's house, and to interrogate

those witnesses who had actually seen, with their own eyes, Mr. Lewis retiring from it, as Father Athanasius, whose horse was still there, had entered it, they were by no means the most remiss in giving vent to their proper sentiments. Thus had the small crowd that we have already alluded to originally congregated, and arrested, in its turn, the footsteps of many labourers, operatives, and other strangers, as they were proceeding into Glanford, to take a part there in the forthcoming demonstration.

"What's the row here, Bill?" said one of the latter to his companion, by all appearance an artisan, like himself; "have you made out yet?"

"Not a bit of it," replied Bill; "but there is always something or other that turns up out of a crowd. Perhaps you could tell us, old lady?" added he, addressing a neighbouring personage, to whom the designation perfectly applied.

"I haven't exactly come at it," answered she; "but I understand that it is some priests and Papists, who have been insulting a clergyman, and forcing themselves up to the deathbed of a poor girl in there."

"That's for her money, you know," observed Bill.

"You may take your oath to that, Bill," rejoined his comrade.

"I shouldn't think that the like of her had much," said the old lady.

"Never you mind that, Ma'am," exclaimed Bill; "it is not so much that they want; for a little here, and a little there, makes up a decent figure towards the end of the year. I was reading all about it in the 'Lincoln Express' the night before last."

"And they won't leave off neither," remarked a new-comer, "until we have given some of them a right good ducking, as they deserve."

The laugh of approbation, which this sentiment called forth, had scarcely subsided, when Bill's voice was again heard crying out:

"Lord bless us! there they be upon, my word! They arn't agoing to carry off the sick girl, are they? She looks pale enough, to be sure, but I shouldn't say that she was dying neither."

"That arn't the dead un, man," interposed the old lady, who was a stranger to the village; "she must be the one they was a talking of just now, who is in league with the priest, and insulted the clergyman."

"If I had my ways, I should have her ducked with the rest," resumed the original author of the motion, whose rubicund complexion would scarcely have testified that his tastes were so decidedly aquatic.

In the meanwhile, she to whom these latter observations referred had been somewhat startled on beholding, as she prepared to issue from Mrs. Hawthorne's cottage, the numerous assemblage which was hanging around it, as well as the decidedly unfriendly and disrespectful expression of all the eyes which were rivetted upon her.

"What can these good people want?" whispered she to St. Edmunds, who was close at her side.

"I have no conception," answered he; "but I don't think that they look quite so civil as they should. What are they here for, Waddinghead?"

The cautious keeper, who had been a silent though by no means an inattentive observer of the proceedings without, and whose secret sympathies were not exclusively enlisted on the same side as his allegiance, shook his head ominously, but made no other reply until again urged, in a more imperative tone, by his interrogator.

"Well, my Lord, to tell you the truth," he then said, "these here folk don't much like what's been a-going on inside there; and the sooner the priest takes himself off the better, I wot."

"Surely they won't injure him, Waddinghead, will they?"

"I hope not; but there's no saying exactly, with so many strangers about."

The young officer fixed his eyes keenly upon the speaker, and then said:

"I suppose that I can depend upon you, Waddinghead."

The keeper, though a little perplexed by the altered and haughty tone of St. Edmunds, replied by a most distinct affirmation.

"Then look here," rejoined our hero, "get the priest's horse right up to the door, and keep those fellows back a little. Miss Basinstoke," added he, in a lower voice, "I am sure that I shall be acting agreeably to your wishes by providing, in the first instance, for the unmolested departure of Father Athanasius."

Cécile's look fully confirmed the assent which her words uttered.

"Even were there any prospect of danger," continued he, "I should not have to entreat you, Miss Basinstoke, to fear nothing; but

here we can surely have nothing to apprehend."

"I trust not, indeed," replied she, "for, in truth, I am no heroine, and all these scowling faces affect me strangely. Shall I tell Father Athanasius that you think he had better soon withdraw?"

"Why, yes, you will do very wisely."

Thus advised, Cécile retired into the house, and in a few minutes returned with her confessor. The appearance of the latter called forth, first a low murmuring, then a loud shout of antipathy, from the surrounding crowd.

"Bring that horse up, Waddinghead," said our hero, in the tone of one to whom the word of command was by no means unfamiliar. "Close up to the door, I say, and, while you hold him, I will take care that those fellows stand back."

These directions having been complied with, the young Viscount extended his hand to the Priest, as he urged him not to delay his departure, which public mark of courtesy called forth a fresh shout of derision from the crowd. Nor were their unfriendly dispositions apparently satisfied with this outburst, for several of the more excited among them actually closed in, with a view of intercepting the Priest's retreat; but the resolute bearing of the stalwart Father, of Waddinghead, and of St. Edmunds himself, induced no small hesitation on their part.

"Now then, my men!" exclaimed the latter, "if you please, let this gentleman pass. That's right; stand back; a little more still."

"I have as good a right to be here as you," doggedly replied a sturdy mechanic.

"Not to my mind," retorted St. Edmunds, enforcing his opinion by a thrust of his arm, which sent his antagonist staggering some way back upon those behind him.

This little episode produced a momentary diversion, which enabled the Reverend Father to reach the outskirts of the crowd, from whence he could set spurs to his horse without betraying any inordinate precipitation; but when thus foiled in their foremost purpose, the assailants vented their disappointment upon those who had been instrumental to it, and groans, imprecations, and menaces were re-echoed on all sides. In vain did Waddinghead, now aided by some of Sir Charles's labourers and retainers, attempt to explain to the excited strangers the real station and character of the objects of their resentment;

all expostulation was useless and indeed unintelligible among the reiterated shouts of :—“Down with the bloody Papists,”—“Give the death-bed robbers a good ducking!”—and so forth.

We have stated above that our hero was constitutionally averse to seeking out danger, but it was still less in his nature to shun it, when it crossed his path. The stout heart of his forefathers, which had won their hereditary honours on many a listed field, beat no less freely within him, and if he had shown himself somewhat appalled shortly before at the sight of poor Mabel's impotent death-struggles, his spirit now rose with all the congenial emergency of the conflict. It was not so with Cécile ; the hostile cries, the angry countenances, each portentous sign of a contest, in which she could take no part, but which might prove so fatal to others, struck with fearful coldness upon her gentle heart, and when St. Edmunds again joined her, he could well see that her fortitude was fast giving way.

“What are we to do?” muttered she faintly.

“Do, Miss Basinstoke?” replied he. “In the first and foremost place, do not be alarmed; and in the next, do not show the slightest symptom of hesitation or concession. If we move forward at once, they will soon fall back; pray accept my arm and fear nothing.”

This prognostication of the over-confident Viscount was not borne out, for, ere they had advanced many steps, their progress was rudely intercepted by his former antagonist.

“You had better stand back,” cried St. Edmunds.

“You had better,” was the insolent retort; “I'm a match for you, I should hope.”

This sentiment was at once corroborated by a fresh shout from the bystanders, and by a discharge of stones from the outer circle, one of which struck the keeper on the face.

“You had better take care, my masters, upon my word you had,” exclaimed Waddinghead, raising the gun which the young Lord had handed over to him when the shooting was over. “I have two loaded barrels for you here.”

“By Jove! I had forgotten that,” said St. Edmunds; “that would be no joke, indeed. Show me that gun, Waddinghead.”

The assailants drew back not a little, when they saw the murderous weapon in the hands of their foremost opponent; but they were entirely mistaken as to his purpose, for,

after having whispered to Cécile not to be alarmed at the mere report, he dropped her arm for a moment, and then deliberately discharged the two barrels into the air.

“That will do now, Waddinghead,” added he, returning the gun: “you can use the butt-end, if required, as some of these rascals have sticks; and now let us move on.”

Though the evening had been a remarkably clear one for the time of year, the shades of twilight were already so darkened as to render St. Edmund's chivalrous action discernible to those alone who were in his immediate neighbourhood. Thus it was, that while the latter freely responded to the spirit in which it was performed, many of those who were further away, misled by the ominous sound, as well as by the cries of many of the women who, no less sincerely, conceived themselves to be seriously wounded, grew more vociferous than ever for contention and revenge. They pressed furiously forward and, in a moment more, the scuffle began in right earnest. The accession of strength which the party from the Hall had of late received rendered the contest far less unequal than it would originally have been. Still it required no small degree of determination on their part to keep the aggressors at bay, and our hero was constrained himself to use his heavy loading-rod very liberally to protect the trembling Cécile from personal molestation.

How much longer the struggle could have continued, we will not undertake to say, but fortunately a diversion was most opportunely offered by the sudden arrival, on the adjoining road, of a barouche and four, from which was seen to issue an elderly gentleman, who was at once pronounced to be a magistrate. This popular surmise turned out to be unusually correct, for the new comer was no other than our esteemed friend Sir Charles Basinstoke himself, who, on his return from Glanford, had been arrested, first, by the report, then by the appearance, of a serious breach of the peace. The person of the worthy Baronet was known to some among the crowd, to whom those of St. Edmunds and Cécile were not equally familiar; with others, the aristocratic sentiment, which so happily pervades all classes in England, was most favourably impressed by the aspect of the equipage; and thus it was that, not without some dissenting voices, Sir Charles was generally accepted as a mediator.

“What is it, my boys, what is it? How

did it begin?" exclaimed he, as he made his way towards the centre of the animated assemblage.

Twenty eager voices responded at once, each setting forth a distinct and separate charge against the presumed Romanists.

"Papists, are they?" rejoined the Baronet; "just let me make them out and I will soon confess them, I will. Where are they? this way? God bless my soul! you cannot mean that it was they!"

This last exclamation was uttered, when he ascertained the most unwelcome fact that the delinquents were no others than his niece and St. Edmunds.

"Ah! Cécile," added he in a low tone, "I thought it would come to this at last."

"When we can explain what has occurred," immediately answered our hero, "you will see that no blame can rest on our side; but now our only care should be to place Miss Basinstoke as soon as possible in safety."

His uncle implied his tacit assent by offering his arm to Cécile, and leading her at once to the carriage, which was ordered to proceed homewards so soon as all three had taken their seat. But alas! for the instability of popular favour! Those among the assailants who had most eagerly welcomed, a few minutes before, the magistrate, when they conceived that his intervention would be in accordance with their views, were now the most indignant of all at the countenance shown by him to the opposite party. Scarcely had the carriage moved off when loud groans, intermingled with cries of "Down with the Papists"—"He is more than half way to Rome"—"He is a Papist too"—resounded on all sides.

To describe the indignant fury of the little Baronet would be quite beyond our powers. He stamped, he swore, he stamped again, and finally, notwithstanding the expostulations of his nephew, who was now convulsed with suppressed laughter, he actually desired that the carriage should stop, and threw open the door that he might himself address the deluded many-headed. So sharp, however, was their response of shrieks, of stones, and of mud, that the oration was forcibly brought to a very premature end, and the speaker borne rapidly away from the scene of the controversy by the imperative orders of St. Edmunds.

CHAPTER IX.

SAINT CECILIA REPRIMANDED.

THE usually joyous dinner-table of Redburn Hall was, on this evening of the 5th of November, 1850, singularly sad and silent. Constance was again confined to her room with a head-ache; Cécile, exhausted by the proceedings of the day, had not found strength to appear; Edward had stayed on at the Thornhills. The small party was thus reduced to three persons, not one of whom seemed in a very elated or conversable mood; but the sullen asperity of Lady Helen's manner, and the quiescent pensiveness into which our hero was continually relapsing, whether in consequence of the absence of his fair cousin, or of a smart blow on the head, administered to him by our recent acquaintance Bill, showed as nought by the forlorn despondency of the master of the house. Never, in the memory of his oldest servant, had his ruddy countenance revealed any such symptoms of mental prostration, and his sole but oft-muttered exclamation, "I never could have believed it!" marked that he was no less amazed at the cause, than they were at the traces of his internal anguish. At length the domestics retired, and his over-wrought feelings sought some relief in a freer expression.

"If five thousand pounds had been offered upon it, I would have taken it! To think that for six and fifty years have I been, man and boy, moving backwards and forwards upon that road to Glanford, at every hour of the day or night, and never met with an uncivil look until this blessed day! And now, here am I insulted, and hooted, and pelted in my own carriage, on my own land, almost at my very hall-door! I could not have believed it if I had read of it in fifty papers!"

"Well but, my dear," observed Lady Helen, who, by the by, if she were really anxious to soothe her husband's irritated feelings, was not, on this occasion, peculiarly skilful or successful, "are you quite sure that you were recognised?"

"Recognised! of course I was!" retorted he angrily; "I have already told you that I heard my name mentioned twenty times, and who else but me in the county would they hoot as a Papist now-a-days? I verily believe, that one fellow was hailing me as a cardinal, forsooth!"

"Come, Sir Charles," interposed his nephew, scarcely suppressing a smile, "I was

nearer wearing a red cap than you were this afternoon. After all, you came in for the best part of it. If you had had such a rap on the head as I got, you might have some reason to sing out."

"I will tell you what it is, nephew," said Sir Charles, by no means responding to St. Edmunds's tone. "It is all a very good joke, I dare say, for you who have your station, and a most honourable one it is, in another part of the country. But mine is here; through life my object has been that it should remain creditable, and I cannot see it forfeited, day by day, with indifference. What appears to divert you so vastly may also amuse others, in a far other spirit, and I am not at all prepared to become the laughing-stock of Lincolnshire, I can tell you."

"I wish that I could exactly make out what Cécile was doing there, contrary to her uncle's repeated orders," observed Lady Helen, ever anxious to bring back the conversation to what she conceived to be its main point.

"Ah! that is exactly it. What in life took her there, and on this day of all others?" cried Sir Charles, emphatically striking the table with his fist. "Hadn't I desired her never to go near those Hawthornes again? Hasn't she vowed to me more than once, till she was black in the face, that she would never attempt any proselyting nonsense about here? How came she there at all, I want to know?"

"You will wait some time till you hear, Sir Charles," remarked Lady Helen; "at least, if we are to abide by her account of the business. She will be careful not to show herself, I should say, until she thinks that other matters may have afforded some diversion to our present feelings."

"Indeed, Lady Helen," said St. Edmunds, "if you had witnessed all that I saw this afternoon, you would think that your niece's absence might bear some other construction."

"Construction! destruction, rather," muttered Sir Charles. "She will be the ruin of my family and her own, that girl will be."

"Ah! who said so from the first?" inquired Lady Helen, in a tone which seemed to respond to its own query.

"But what was she doing there at all?" reiterated the Baronet, who was in one of those irritable moods, which seems imperatively to seek out homœopathic treatment.

"I wish that I could get an answer to that."

"I should be very happy indeed, Sir

Charles, if I could give you an accurate and complete one, but that is not in my power," observed St. Edmunds. "I think that you will find, however, that the death-bed message received by Miss Cécile was one to which she could not but attend."

"Death-bed nonsense! Why on earth are such messages to come to my house, and not to the parson's? Lucky that we had not twenty death-beds this evening instead of one; and so you would have had, I can tell you, if I had not chanced to step in, more for your good fortune than for mine, that's certain."

Thus did the disconsolate Baronet continue to prey upon his own annoyance, and so serious did it become, that the ultimate change of scene from the dining-room to the drawing-room afforded no relief to it, and that it even dispelled his usual evening slumbers. Our hero, finding his efforts to impart any comfort in that quarter utterly unavailing, while none was required by Lady Helen, whose grief at the occurrences of the day was tempered, if not absorbed, by some secret but intense feeling of gratulation, finally betook himself to a most conscientious perusal of the last London newspaper. He was still engrossed by this study, when, just as the tea had been brought in, the door of the room was gently opened, and, with her usual noiseless step, Cécile glided into her accustomed seat. Neither Sir Charles nor Lady Helen stirred from their place or addressed a word to her, but St. Edmunds was soon at her side.

"May I trust that you are pretty well again," whispered he, "since you have given us this most unexpected pleasure?"

"I suppose that I have done right to come," remarked she, answering her own thoughts rather than his inquiry.

"Well, I should say that you have, Miss Basinstoke, upon the principle that difficulties should be encountered at once."

"An excellent rule certainly for such valour as mine, which can brook to think upon danger even less than to face it. But," added she anxiously, "I am strangely remiss in not asking how you are yourself, for I am sure that you were struck once at least."

"So I have ascertained since; but you know that we soldiers have skulls, Miss Basinstoke, far harder than yours, and I believe that the stick must have been the more hurt of the two."

"You are indeed constituted otherwise

than we are," observed Cécile pensively. "I have sometimes, like other simpletons, been inclined to rebel against the superiority attributed to the lords of the creation, but I have discovered to-day upon what it rests. Never shall I forget how you seemed to exult and rejoice in that awful affray."

While this half-whispered dialogue was proceeding, Cécile had not been unmindful of her ministration, and the tea being now ready, she poured out three cups. One she silently handed to St. Edmunds, as to the stranger present, and then, slowly rising, she took to her uncle another, prepared according to his peculiar taste. When she approached him, however, he gruffly exclaimed:—

"Thank you, I am very much obliged to you! I am going to the tea-table."

"Shall I bring you your tea, Lady Helen?"

"No; I am going to the table also."

Thus repulsed, Cécile returned to her seat, but the promised accession of strength by no means induced additional conviviality to the small party. No one spoke. It was the ominous lull which will generally precede that most unwelcome phenomenon of domestic nature, familiarly called a scene. So impressive was it, in this case, that the subdued tea-urn itself, as we have been credibly informed, hushed into affrighted silence its own cheerful voice in awful apprehension of the coming storm. Occasionally Cécile would cast a furtive glance towards the countenance of Lady Helen, and then her look would quail, and her lip quiver at the smile of relentless resolution which was beginning to break there. The placid executioner well knew, however, that suspense was even more irksome than suffering to the victim's ardent disposition, and the preliminary probation was certainly amply prolonged.

At length Sir Charles and Lady Helen arose, moved toward the fire-place, and the culprit was summoned. Poor Cécile, she need have been at no pains to disclaim any peculiar gift of heroism; the tremor of her whole frame clearly denoted the workings of her nature's law. More discreet would it have been perchance on the part of our hero, if, at this juncture, he had retired from the room; but his conscience, like that of Cécile, would frequently plead the cause of temptation, and, as we will fain hope, he fully persuaded himself that his presence and testimony might be of some eventual service to the weaker party.

"Perhaps you will condescend," began Lady Helen, "at your own convenience, to give us some explanation of your share in this morning's lamentable proceedings."

"Any that you may require, of course, Lady Helen."

"Then how came you, may I ask, to be the whole afternoon with that wretched Hawthorne girl, in defiance of your uncle's most positive orders, and of mine?"

"I received this letter," replied Cécile, drawing one from under her sash; "if you will kindly read it, you will see how anxiously, how earnestly I was appealed to. Still, I trust that I should not have disobeyed your commands had I not been assured that a blood-vessel was broken, and that life itself was failing fast."

"I suppose you would have considered it unbecoming and undignified in the extreme, to have mentioned this circumstance to me beforehand, and to have afforded me an opportunity of, most deferentially, suggesting my own views on the subject."

"Indeed, Lady Helen, I immediately ran in search of you throughout the house, and even waited some time in your sitting-room; but having ascertained that you were gone out, and being much pressed by the messenger, I thought it best to consult Conny without further delay. She most strongly urged me to go, assuring me that, in this peculiar case, you could not disapprove when you knew all, and I trust that she was not mistaken."

Lady Helen responded by an impatient wave of the head, and glanced at the proffered letter.

"I see here," resumed she shortly, "ample evidence of what I have feared throughout. If you will look over it, Sir Charles, you will find that I was not so wholly wrong in attributing to the countenance and support of your niece that ruined girl's obdurate resistance to the wishes of her family. Who else is appealed to but Cécile, to uphold her in her last crowning act of ingratitude and disobedience?"

"Ah! that's clear enough anyhow," observed Sir Charles, after having read the letter.

"But who else in this neighbourhood," meekly interposed Cécile, "could be appealed to in such an emergency by a Catholic girl?"

"A Roman Catholic, if you please," sharply interposed her aunt.

"I beg your pardon, but we are accustomed to style ourselves Catholics."

"No impertinence, pray, or I shall desire you to leave the room."

"Indeed," exclaimed the indignant Cécile, "I am here now through no particular inclination of mine, but rather to perform what I conceive to be a duty."

"Then you will be so good as to show your sense of that duty by a proper respect for the feelings and wishes of those whom you are addressing."

St. Edmunds was one of those who could not see, without a very intense inward pang, a naturally proud spirit humbled and trampled upon, chained fast to the post, and then relentlessly lashed for not leaving it. But Cécile, who had long been accustomed to kick against the pricks, had also long since ascertained that they were wondrously hard and sharp. To be sure, she would occasionally, even now, stamp upon them until those little feet of hers, which, by the way, are amazingly diminutive, would be, metaphorically, streaming with blood; but, in every case, the cold iron very speedily carried the day. Thus it was, that while our hero was twisting his moustache, in a state of the fiercest excitement, the Saint was enabled to proceed in a comparatively subdued tone.

"I can assure you, Lady Helen," said she, "that you are quite mistaken if you suppose that I ever exercised or sought to exercise any particular influence over poor Mabel Hawthorne's last decision. I never spoke to her upon religious subjects, nor indeed upon any other, until she had repeatedly applied to me in moments of great distress. At your desire, I ceased all communication with her; and, even to-day, I merely protected her from the undue interference of others, but was guilty of none myself."

"Exactly," replied Lady Helen, sarcastically; "I wonder that you do not say at once that you urged her to show the only mark of deference and respect which it was in her power to give to those who had brought discredit on their own house, by affording her a shelter there from public ignominy. Of course, you were in no way concerned in the message sent to Father Fastwell, or in the affront offered to Mr. Lewis."

"I speak nothing but the truth, Lady Helen, and, if I am not to be believed, I cannot conceive why I am questioned. It was but reasonable that when I saw the poor dy-

ing girl's hopes of peace or comfort, either present or future, resting upon an interview with one whom we both considered as alone authorised to bind and to loose, I should use my utmost endeavour to ensure her that last solace. In this I performed a clear and imperative duty, but, I sincerely trust, with every possible regard to Mr. Lewis's feelings."

"So the consequences have most clearly testified; but these, I suppose, must appear entirely unworthy of concern to a person who is acting upon so distinct and exalted a mission from above."

"I have received no sort of mission from above, I firmly believe, Lady Helen, and it is this persuasion which has enabled me so conscientiously to give and to keep my pledge of never interfering with the creed of others. As for the consequences to which you are alluding, the blind bigotry of those who so wantonly assailed us must alone remain accountable for them."

"I hope that you hear that, Sir Charles; we are the bigots, the assailants, and so forth. However, as you say nothing, I suppose that you agree to that."

"Do I, by G—!" cried the Baronet, whose long-smouldering feelings were now beginning to kindle. "I'll tell you what it is, Miss Cécile, once for all, I am very happy to have you here, and to do what I can for you; but I have other concerns than yours in the world, and other people's interests to provide for. I dare say it appears a very small matter to you that my position in the county should be forfeited, through your agency, and that I should be hooted, mobbed, and pelted up to my very house-door. I take another view of it, I can tell you, and consider that I might have expected some better requital from you."

"What! gratitude, consideration for heretics and infidels, on the part of the truly faithful! My dear Sir Charles, what can you mean?" observed Lady Helen.

"The immense debt of gratitude which I owe shall be paid to the utmost of my ability," replied Cécile, trembling more violently than before, but not with anxiety now; "and where no gratitude is due, I trust that God will give me patience to endure, and charity to forgive. As yet, I have believed, my dear uncle, that, in accepting your kind protection, I was acting in accordance with your wishes. From the hour that I should think otherwise, I should certainly endeavour to

relieve you at once from a truly unprofitable burden."

"Oh, indeed! and what might then be your destination, may I ask?" interposed Lady Helen.

"It matters little, I should say, so that it be honourable and independent."

"To be sure, I had quite forgotten. What an interesting and romantic case it will be; driven, like a martyr, by the tyranny and persecution of her relatives, to earn her bread for herself! And all this, my dear," continued Lady Helen, addressing her spouse, "because, as you so truly said just now, there are other concerns in the world than hers, and because we venture occasionally, yet very rarely, to offer a few words of advice with the experience of another generation."

"Very presumptuous, to be sure," resumed the Baronet; "still, we must take that liberty sometimes, and Cécile has quite sense enough to see, when she has recovered her temper, that we are, after all, performing our duty towards her. But whom have we here? Mr. Lewis, as I am alive, and right glad I am to see him!"

Sir Charles corroborated this exclamation, by moving forward heartily to greet the young incumbent.

"Most happy indeed am I to see you!" repeated he, "and to tell you how deeply Lady Helen and I regret what occurred this morning."

"And you may well add," interposed Lady Helen, "how truly annoyed and concerned we are, that any one belonging to us should have been connected with so unbecoming a proceeding. All that I can say is, that, had she been any child of mine, she should have entreated your forgiveness upon her knees."

"And so I will kneel to him, if it be required!" exclaimed the over-excited Cécile; "not to claim forgiveness where there has been no offence, but to adjure him that he should tell the whole truth, which he so well knows. I appeal to you, Mr. Lewis; did you find me, this morning or ever, unmindful of all that I owe both to your feelings and to your sacred character? If you have a word of reproach or reproof to utter with regard to my conduct to-day, pray let it not remain unsaid."

"I, Miss Basinstoke?" replied the perplexed clergyman. "I really cannot conceive to what you are alluding. Nothing could exceed the courtesy and kindness I met with

from you, in circumstances the saddest and most embarrassing. My only regret can be, that our efforts might not be united in the same cause."

"And I can affirm too," said St. Edmunds, at length overcoming his hesitation to join in a conversation which, after all, had reached him more through accident than by design, "I can affirm, too, that Miss Basinstoke most scrupulously abstained from using any influence over the mind of that poor girl, whose own determination was most clearly shown throughout."

"Ah, indeed! so much the better!" exclaimed the relenting Baronet. "Come, shake hands, Mademoiselle, and, since it has been all so well meant, let's hear no more about it; only, for Heaven's sake! another time, where a priest is really wanted, don't let the message be sent in any of our names. That's all right, so we need not advertise in the 'Times' yet—eh?"

"You know that I have no chance of finding a situation at present," was Cécile's attempted reply; but, for some cause or another, her voice faltered strangely, as she once and again pressed her parent-uncle's hand to her lips, nor, for very many seconds, could her subdued eyes be again raised.

"You see that the child has a heart, after all, Lewis," said the Baronet; "though she is a desperate rebel, to be sure."

"She has indeed a heart, Sir Charles," replied the young clergyman, "and one which, with the grace of God, will, I earnestly trust, lead the wanderer some day into the true fold of Christ."

Cécile now slowly looked up, and, fixing the undimmed lustre of her ardent glance full upon the speaker's countenance, she softly said:

"I have long, indeed, had a misgiving that we should some day, Mr. Lewis, be united in one fold, where you would be my pastor, and earnestly have I prayed that that day may not be long delayed."

We presume that this answer did not receive a precisely similar interpretation from all present, for while the honest Baronet exclaimed: "You see, Lewis, that there is some hope of her still," the young clergyman seemed more embarrassed than otherwise, and even coloured slightly when he saw the grey eye of Lady Helen intently fastened upon him. As, however, he had not yet stated the object of his visit, it was but natu-

ral that he should now have declared it, and he anxiously inquired whether Sir Charles, or those around him, had received any injury during the unfortunate occurrences of the afternoon. This question led to a long and private conversation between him and the master of the house, which afforded the willing Cécile an opportunity for escaping, in the joyful expectation that she would hear no more of the subject just disposed of. Unfortunately, it was otherwise decreed by the "Lincoln Chronicle," which, when opened, on the ensuing morning, was found to contain an article very much to the following effect :

"We have delayed our publication of this day, with a view of giving our readers the earliest intimation which has reached us respecting a very serious affray, that took place, yesterday afternoon, in the neighbourhood of Redburn Hall. It would appear that the Basinstoke family have at length thrown off the mask, and considering, no doubt, the day as a peculiarly felicitous one for a Catholic demonstration, proceeded in such good earnest, as thoroughly to exasperate the honest feelings of the locality. We are, of course, obliged to defer all particulars for the present, but we are credibly informed that several shots were fired, that many serious injuries were received, and that, had it not been for the prompt and energetic goodwill with which Protestant feelings and claims were vindicated, the most fatal results might have ensued. As it is, the lesson has been no less severe than well merited, and we can only trust that it may be equally beneficial."

The worthy Baronet's horror on perusing this paragraph could only have been surpassed by the suppressed exultation of Lady Helen. In vain did Constance, Edward, and St. Edmunds each endeavour to instil some comfort into his wounded spirit, by representing the imaginative statement as a mere electioneering manœuvre ; it was of no avail, the cold steel of the writer's Perryian pen had entered into his soul. Lucky it was that Cécile's natural allies were now closing fast around her, for, during two whole days, neither a word nor a look did she succeed in exchanging with her uncle or with Lady Helen.

CHAPTER X.

EDWARD BASINSTOKE'S LIBERALISM.

ONE solitary ray of consolation and of hope would occasionally break in upon the deep

gloom of Sir Charles Basinstoke's despondency. He could not but remember that the long-promised County Meeting was even now at hand, and that an opportunity would there be afforded to him for thoroughly and completely vindicating himself from the aspersions so malignantly cast upon him by his adversaries.

The great day came at last. The atmospheric heavens did not, to be sure, peculiarly shine upon it, for it was somewhat wet and drizzly ; still, at the appointed time, the chariot and four drove up, the worthy Baronet entered it, with the determined air of one for whom the avenging hour had struck at last, and he was followed by Edward alone, the habitual serenity of whose mien was in nowise impaired by the anticipation of the forthcoming ordeal.

"Don't wait dinner for us after half-past seven, Helen," were Sir Charles's parting words, "but I will try and let you know how things are going on."

Her husband was as good as his word, for Lady Helen received, at about five o'clock, a few hurried lines, which she was kind enough to communicate at once to Cécile, informing the family that a very strong expression of his Protestant sentiments had been very rapturously cheered, and that if Edward, who was to speak later, were to be equally successful, the day would be all for the Basinstokes. As Edward was by far the more practised speaker of the two, his mother could have but little doubt that Sir Charles's most sanguine expectations would be realized. Great, therefore, was her astonishment, and that, indeed, of all who had remained at the Hall, when, on being joined by both the gentlemen, a few minutes after they had sat down to dinner, they observed every possible token of irritation and disappointment in the luckless Baronet's countenance and manner. So long as the servants were present, no explanation could of course be elicited, but no sooner had the door closed upon the last of them, than Constance, with her usual aplomb, inquired if anything had gone wrong.

"Gone wrong !" replied the father bitterly. "Oh ! dear no, not in the least. I shall have to close up the old house here, and go and live abroad, that's all. I would rather finish my days at Rome, I'll be hanged if I wouldn't, than again pass such a month as the last."

"Well, there might be greater misfortunes than that, mightn't there, Cécile ?" resumed

Constance. "But how is it, dear Papa? I thought that your speech had been so well received."

"So it was, and so would anybody's who had spoken out manfully against the Pope and the Papists."

"Then did Edward break down after all?"

"Break down! No. I wish to Heavens that he had, or stayed at home either, sooner than I should have heard him proclaim his milk-and-water rubbish, and bring me also into it, forsooth."

"Come, come," interposed Edward, smiling, "I only said that you had voted for the Catholic Emancipation Bill, as I should, had I been in Parliament then."

"And a cursed fool I was, too, for my pains, and a proper simpleton you must be for having recalled my folly at such a moment."

"Well, but what could I say, after all, save what I feel and think. I only told them that, for the honour of the age, and of the country, I had always hoped and held that the Act of 1829 was final—final, at least, as against pains, penalties, and disabilities."

"And so we are to do nothing, nothing in life, whatever insults or aggressions the Pope may attempt to palm upon us?"

"I do not say that; I have no objection to any declaration setting forth the opinions and sentiments of the majority. But so long as we insure to our clergy alone all the endowments, with the corresponding legal recognition and privileges, we are unassailable, I should say, from the Ultra Protestant party, to whatever attacks we may still remain exposed from other quarters."

"But of late, you seem entirely to have forgotten, Edward," exclaimed Lady Helen, "that we are a Protestant country."

"Indeed, my dear Lady, I have so completely forgotten it, that I cannot remember ever having thought it. We are, to my mind, as a nation, essentially and not very unequally divided upon matters of religious belief, and I do think that we should try and legislate in a measure for all, since we impose our burdens upon all, and claim the allegiance of all."

"But we do not obtain the allegiance of all," retorted Lady Helen, "since so many are satisfied to divide theirs between our Queen and a foreign sovereign."

"What! the divided allegiance again, my lady? I really thought that that was exploded, ever since we admitted that Catholics

might, as well as Protestants, command our regiments and our ships."

"But do they or do they not receive their Bulls, commands, and so forth from Rome, and obey them, also, I want to know?" exclaimed the Baronet, emphatically striking the table with his fist.

"Don't break the glasses, I say," replied the incorrigible Edward, "and Cécile will tell you all about it."

"Indeed I will not," said Cécile smiling. "I beg leave to remark that I am saying nothing at all, and not even looking up from the table."

"Then, I suppose that I must state," resumed Edward, "under correction, of course, from the most Holy Expurgatorius, that there are still, in the Christian world, a certain number of benighted millions who, obstinately looking to the Unity of their Faith, and to the stability of its institutions, do prefer a Spiritual to a Temporal, a Catholic to a National Head. I cannot help laughing once a-day, at least, when I think how well satisfied we English are to live in utter oblivion of all that is going on, even at our very gates. It has been my fate to repeat this very question to Austrians, to Spaniards, and to Frenchmen, each ready to run his sword through my body if I expressed the slightest doubt of the independence of their country, or of their own devotion to it, and I have invariably received the same answer to it."

"What question and what answer?" muttered the Baronet.

"Whether the Catholic acknowledgment of the Pope's Supremacy in any way interfered with their feelings or their duties towards their country and its sovereign. And I was obliged to repeat my question more than once to make it even intelligible. I particularly remember the answer of one Frenchman, and he a Colonel in the army too: 'Do you think,' said he to me, 'that the most arbitrary of all our rulers, Napoleon, would have been satisfied to re-establish a religion which practically transferred to another than to himself any requisite portion of his subjects' fealty. Besides,' added he, 'recollect that we may wish to change the form of our Government without overthrowing our religion, and we are better satisfied to look to Rome, for a last appeal in religious controversies, than to place our Church and Spiritual concerns under the eventual authority of Cavaignac, Louis Napoleon, or Ledru Rollin.'"

"Well, they may have those feelings, and we may have others, I should hope," interrupted the impatient Baronet.

"Of course," replied his imperturbable son, "but take care, in this question, at least, that the National sentiment be not merely the cloak for the sectarian prejudice."

"Prejudice! of course it is always prejudice," cried Sir Charles. "And yet I wish you or somebody would tell me, where the line between Spiritual and Temporal authority is to run, and who is to draw it."

"The question is a most complicated one, I know, and it is in no one's power to divest it entirely of its essential difficulties. My own opinion is, that any state claiming the allegiance of a considerable body of Roman Catholics would do well, for its own sake, to enter into some sort of agreement with Rome respecting their condition and government. Failing, however, this ordinary and obvious remedy, nothing, I should say, is easier than for the Civil Power amply to provide for its own security by purely civil and social enactments. I have not the slightest objection to see a Roman Catholic traitor drawn and quartered, when duly convicted, be he layman, priest, or prelate; but it appears to me a very different matter, constructively to accuse the whole body of permanent treason. Indeed, to my mind, it would be every bit as logical to ostracize the Independants, because Cromwell and his followers discovered the most conclusive texts in Holy Writ for the judicial murder of Charles I., as to proscribe our Roman Catholic countrymen because some day the Pope might incite them to political misconduct."

"Exactly; we are to make no sort of distinction here," said Sir Charles, "while in foreign countries a Protestant is sent to prison merely for reading the Bible."

"If, in other states, the Crown or the majority choose to abuse their power, it is an example which I would rather discard than emulate. But in judging the conduct of foreign countries in these matters, we should perhaps, in fairness and candour, inquire whether they have among their subjects Protestant communities or not. In the latter case, and without examining whether certain religious tenets and practices may not be used now among them, as they have often been in our own history, for political watchwords and incentives, I am almost prepared to admit that they are justified in having recourse to a little gentle compulsion, rather

than forfeit the inestimable blessing of religious concord."

"My dear Edward, is that your liberalism?" cried Constance.

"What! Miss Conny, you too down upon me; attacks from every quarter and support from none! Well, I will have my revenge, and, to illustrate my principle, I will boldly state, that were Saint Cecilia here the only Papist in her Majesty's dominions, I should not have the slightest objection to see her exiled, incarcerated, or indeed destroyed, that we Protestants might thenceforth have it all our own way. In fact, as her apostacy would be still more important for my purpose than her extinction, I should be perfectly satisfied that a little moral or physical torture should be resorted to, if the result were to be the cessation of religious discord amongst us. What say you, Mademoiselle? How many turns of the thumb-screw would you stand before you acknowledged Queen Victoria as the real Vicar or Vicaress of Christ upon earth?"

"Very few indeed, Edward, I much fear, if I am to judge of my fortitude by a very recent test."

"So much the better for my object, though she has quite obstinacy enough to be a martyr, has she not, Lady Helen? To return to my liberalism, however, it would go considerably further than the mere forcible suppression of one Catholic. Taking our Popish and Dissenting fellow-countrymen at their actual amount of millions, I should be perfectly satisfied to enact, for their special persecution and vexation, a great portion of the old penal laws, were the experiment as yet untried. It is because these laws were for ages enforced, ere they were repudiated as a deplorable national failure, that, unable or unwilling any longer to coerce, I would endeavour to conciliate, and, at all events, no longer legislate with the sole view of impeding or promoting the propagation of any peculiar Christian tenets."

"You would put them all on the same footing at once, I suppose," sarcastically observed the Baronet.

"No, at least not yet. I should reserve for our Church, as I have already said, the whole of the endowments and exclusive legal recognition. I am sure that the entire bench of bishops would agree with me in considering these as the two most important prerogatives that the State can confer, and they are equally unassailable by the Pope and by the

minority. Further than this, I am very unwilling to carry on the warfare against them, or rather amongst ourselves."

"Well," retorted his father, "make other countries as liberal towards our faith first, and when we can have judged how these Quixotic notions work among them, we can see about testing them ourselves."

"If you would but come abroad with me sometimes, I would show you many a bright example more worthy of being emulated by us, than that which you were quoting just now. Here the wealthiest and most industrious little community in Europe, fervent beyond all in its Catholic zeal, yet tranquil and loyal, amidst universal commotion, under the rule of its Protestant king. There, another Protestant sovereign, calmly and diplomatically regulating with the See of Rome the temporal attributes of a Catholic hierarchy. Here, an all powerful Autocrat, himself the Spiritual Head of the greatest of Christian schisms, seeking out, for the same purpose, a personal interview with the head of the parent Church. There, the most illustrious of Catholic nations freely conceding, not only extreme toleration, but even proportionate recognition and endowment to the dissenting minorities. What do you say to that, Sir Charles?"

"I say that I shall believe it when I have seen it."

"Then just step over with me to Paris this winter, and I will show you the Archbishop complacently officiating at Notre Dame for the benefit of the nation at large, while each Protestant congregation is provided, at the expense of the State, with churches equally magnificent, and pastors wholly independent of their flocks."

"And a nice hash the whole makes, too, by all accounts."

"Ah! they are now traversing a fearful political ordeal, to be sure; yet I cannot conceive that they would be a whit the happier, were the miseries of religious contention superadded to their other self-inflicted evils."

"But you are always talking, it strikes me, Edward," interposed Constance, "as if some direful measure of persecution were called for, and I cannot see that any such is required."

"No, we only want, what is equally impolitic, a measure of vexation. And then, it is not so much the object which I repudiate as the means employed to attain it. Did you ever hear the story of the Quaker and the Dog, Miss Conny?"

"No, Mr. Edward."

"Then I must tell you, that one day the dog barked at the Quaker, upon which the Quaker said: 'I will not smite thee, and I would not injure thee, but I will give thee a bad name.' He shouted, 'mad dog!' the whole village rose, and, in a very few minutes, the victim was hunted to death. It strikes me that it is to some such process that we are now resorting, in response to that last bark from the Vatican, without even having the excuse of, at least, pursuing the real offender."

"I cannot see," resumed Constance, "truly as I regret the intemperance displayed by some, that any one will be much injured after all, if a Bill should be passed to prevent the new Bishops from assuming their titles."

"Will you sketch out the Bill, wiseacre?"

"No; but I should hope that the Parliament of England is competent to do so."

"We shall see; some difficulties are insoluble in their nature, and this, I fear, is one. So complicated is the question, in all its bearings, and through all its antecedents, that I do not foresee how we can give any substantial satisfaction to the cry which we are now promoting and fostering, without contradicting the whole of our recent policy, and this, I am not prepared to do. England should not legislate in vain!"

"In short," cried his mother, "you are willing to plead every one's cause, and to enter into every one's sentiments but our own."

"Not so, dear my Lady; but when I see that the Cardinal's Pastoral has actually prevented you, a rational woman, in the enjoyment of excellent health, and of a splendidly endowed clergy, from closing your eyes during three whole weeks, I cannot but reflect upon the tortures which you would endure, were you to see his Eminence actually installed on the Archbishop of Canterbury's throne, the latter reverend prelate branded as a traitor and an impostor, and you yourself called upon to pay for the due support of his rival's dignity. If you will just reverse the question, you will see that this is precisely the cup which a considerable portion of our countrymen, and countrywomen, too, are daily constrained to drain, and I must own that I do not wish to add to its bitterness."

"If these were the sentiments which you expounded to-day," interposed the laughing Constance, "I should suppose that the sooner we prepared for our foreign journey the better."

"Oh! no; I was very far from being so imprudent—I began, I can assure you, in a strain of the most orthodox bigotry, and was most rapturously cheered, until I grew still more ashamed of myself than of my audience. I then hazarded a few very guarded words of moderation and Christian charity, and thus prepared Charles Angerstein's triumph. I am sorry that you did not hear him, by the by, Miss Conny, you, who voted him an idiot, or something of the kind, after a few minutes' conversation. He really spoke remarkably well for a beginner, and he will make a very fair member for the County."

"I wish you had found that out three years ago," growled out Sir Charles, "that's all. I could have made much better use of my two thousand five hundred pounds, I can tell you, Edward, than squandering them in attempting to keep up, for no purpose, the family interest."

"Yes, indeed," echoed Lady Helen, as she arose to withdraw.

After the departure of the ladies, the subject of the foregoing discourse was not resumed, but no sooner had Edward Basinstoke entered the drawing-room, than, seating himself at Cécile's side, he whispered to her:

"Well, you allowed me to fight your battle all alone."

"I am not at all sure that it was my battle," replied she.

"None will ever be fought more directly in your cause; or I should rather say, Cécile, for your sake."

She who was thus addressed coloured slightly, and, slowly raising her anxious eyes, answered, in a tone of gentle reproach:

"I had hoped that any sacrifices you may have made, Edward, were inspired by your conscience alone."

"Say rather by my feelings, Cécile, and you will be nearer the truth. If a Senate even, and not a constituency, had been applauding me to-day, still would I have seen one pure, one heavenly glance fixed upon me with an expression of calm but thrilling reproach, that would have silenced the voice of Ambition herself. Cécile, do you know whose glance that is—the light of my heart—the beacon of my path."

Saint Cecilia sighed deeply, as one grieved and perplexed in the extreme, and then, looking in the direction of Lady Helen, she said, with an attempted smile:

"That one, I suppose, which is so intently scrutinizing you now; but I must go to

Conny, and ask her in what colour she wishes me to ground these roses of hers."

CHAPTER XI.

SAINT CECILIA REPRIMANDED AGAIN.

THE ensuing day brought with it no fresh tribulation to the inmates of Redburn Hall, but it was not so with its successor, for the "Lincoln Chronicle," when opened by Sir Charles, after his breakfast, was found to contain, in very prominent type, the following paragraph:

"IMPORTANT RESPECTING THE BASINSTOKES.

"We have adverted somewhat severely, in another part of our impression, to the zealously ultramontane sentiments advocated by our present member at the County Meeting. Some explanation, and in the eyes of the fairer portion of our readers some extenuation, may be afforded, for this utter dereliction of his duty towards his constituents, by an announcement which has just reached us. We have very good authority for stating that the preliminaries of his marriage with his Roman Catholic cousin, Miss Cécile Basinstoke, are now finally arranged, the only obstacle having been removed by the all but open abjuration of the future bridegroom himself. We trust that he may find in this union, the result, we are assured, of a long-standing attachment, ample compensation for the political sacrifices which it must ultimately entail upon him."

When he had perused these lines, Sir Charles Basinstoke remained as one thunder-stricken; but so soon as the vital powers were in any degree restored, his first impulse was to remove at once with the obnoxious paper to the library, where he was very speedily followed by Lady Helen.

"I see that something is going wrong," anxiously exclaimed she. "For Heaven's sake, what is it?"

Her husband silently pointed to the paper, and to the paragraph. On glancing at the latter, Lady Helen turned very pale, but merely said:

"I am not at all surprised."

"God bless my soul!" cried Sir Charles, "you don't mean to say that you think that there is anything going on between them?"

"I cannot bring myself to believe that Edward would be quite such a fool; but as to her, my opinion has long been, as you well know, that you could not have picked up in all England, nor yet in France, where she comes from, a more astute and designing girl."

"Upon my word, it looks very like it; but what are we to do now?"

"Do! why at once stop the whole thing, if we possibly can. And to think," added she,

clasping her hands, "how easily it might have been prevented, if I had been but listened to! It really is a dangerous thing to tempt Providence, as we have done."

"Well, shall we send for her at once? There is no use speaking to Edward, I suppose."

"At all events, we had better hear first what she has to say for herself. I can send for her to my room, when the others are dispersed, or perhaps to your study, where what we may have to state may make more impression."

It was in the latter little apartment, accordingly, that the unconscious culprit's attendance was required within the hour. She came tripping cheerfully in, for a summons thither was generally the harbinger of a small present, or of some festive invitation and intelligence; but no sooner did she perceive that Lady Helen was with her uncle, than the blithesome expression fast gave way to one of intense apprehension.

"Cécile," began Sir Charles, sternly, so soon as the door closed upon her, "did you see the 'Lincoln Chronicle' this morning?"

"No, my dear uncle. I hope it has brought no bad news."

"Perhaps you may not think so, though we do. Just look over that article."

No sooner had poor Cécile's eye fallen upon the paragraph pointed out to her, than she coloured deeply, and then grew deadly pale, as might have been expected from one of her sensitive nature, thus unceremoniously dragged before the public. Lady Helen, however, sought no such general explanation for the fact, but whispered, in a perfectly audible tone:

"We can easily see, by her face, that there is something in it."

"Well, what do you say to that, pray?" resumed Sir Charles, addressing his niece.

"Say?" replied Cécile, sadly; "that it is merely a malicious report, fabricated evidently with a view of annoying you."

"A malicious report; oh, very well!" interposed Lady Helen. "We could have told you that it is malicious and injurious too in the extreme; but what we wish to know is, whether it is entirely unfounded?"

"Entirely, I trust, Lady Helen."

"Cécile," resumed her aunt, in her bitterest tone, "I hope that this may be one of the cases, in which the faithful can speak the real truth to heretics without committing either a mortal or a venial sin. You say that you trust it may be unfounded; surely none

better than yourself can tell what we desire to learn, whether there is any foundation at all for the rumour, or not?"

"None whatever, I firmly believe."

"None whatever, you firmly believe," repeated Lady Helen, in a tone which might have rivalled that of Mr. Clarkson, or of any other eminent cross-questioner. "I wish that I could obtain from you what we, in heretic England, call a plain, straightforward, and honest answer. As this, however, is not to be expected, I must try to arrive at the truth somewhat more circuitously. Can you affirm that you never have exchanged with my son one single word bearing, directly or indirectly, upon the subject here alluded to?"

"I can, Lady Helen, most solemnly."

"Can you as positively assure us, that in all those whispering conversations for which, in some manner or another, such ample opportunity is afforded, no single word ever fell from him expressive of any particular regard for yourself. Come, for this once, a plain answer."

"It shall be a plain answer," cried poor Cécile, all trembling with indignation which she could no longer subdue. "It is cruel sport, on your part, Lady Helen, thus to torture one who, as you know, thinks as honestly and feels more deeply than you can."

"No impertinence, if you please. We must allow, of course, for a little vexation and loss of temper, at our premature and very indiscreet interference, and we must put up with a certain amount of sighs, and groans, and clasping of hands; but I shall endure no direct insolence, remember that."

"None was intended, indeed, Lady Helen," resumed Cécile, in a somewhat calmer voice. "My sole endeavour was to remind you that the present subject is, in itself, and inevitably, very painful, and—and very embarrassing to one who has so little experience as myself."

"A deficiency," interposed Lady Helen, "which I may as well tell you at once that I attribute solely to want of opportunity."

"You cannot surely be called upon to assign any other motive," observed poor Cécile, meekly, hoping, no doubt, to conciliate somewhat, by this concession, her relentless interrogator. "As far as my intercourse with Edward is concerned, I can answer, with respect to myself, that my feelings are truly and strictly those of a grateful and affection-

ate sister; and, with respect to his, that, upon the whole, they seem very much of the same nature. Still, perhaps you would do well, Lady Helen, to mention to him any misgivings which you may entertain upon the matter."

"I suppose, Sir Charles," said Lady Helen, "that all this, translated into old-fashioned Saxon, means that the girl fancies that there is fervent attachment for her on Edward's side, to which she does not respond."

"Nothing of the kind, my dear uncle, did I dream of insinuating," cried the anxious Cécile. "You know Edward as well as I do; you are aware that he is accustomed to use language which may be either that of courteous compliment, or of sincere but fast-fleeting sympathy. Such words he has occasionally, perhaps, though very rarely, addressed to me. I earnestly trust that in attributing them merely to the general habits of London or Paris society, I have not been mistaken. At all events, I am sure that they need not give Lady Helen, or you, or myself, the slightest concern."

"Why so, pray, Mademoiselle?" inquired the Baronet, who seemed really desirous of arriving at a satisfactory conclusion.

"In the first place," resumed Cécile, attempting to smile, "you must know that Edward is far too sensible, seriously to think of me."

"Well, and in the second place?" rejoined her uncle, evidently very incompletely reassured by the first motive adduced.

"In the second place," answered she, now blushing still more deeply, "because—in short, my dear uncle, because, I could never dream of setting my affections upon—upon a person of another persuasion than my own."

"Ha! ha! ha! The girl's assurance really surpasses all belief," exclaimed Lady Helen, with an ironical laugh. "We had quite forgotten that; of course, we can have nothing to apprehend. She stoop to marry a Protestant, indeed! I wonder that she is not still more offended at the bare suggestion. To be sure, the difficulty might be got rid of in the manner suggested by the paper, and then, perhaps, she might so far condescend as to establish herself here upon a permanent footing."

"Stop a bit," rejoined the Baronet anxiously. "It is no such joking matter, now we come to put two and two together, that Master Edward should be taking up all these

outlandish notions upon religious matters, which he was setting forth last night. He may be more of her mind, after all, than we dreamed of."

"Indeed, my dear uncle," observed Cécile, smiling, "I think that you may as safely dismiss all concern upon this head as upon the other. None, I should think, could differ more widely than Edward and I upon religious or, perhaps I should say, upon spiritual matters."

"I perceive, I understand very well, what you mean to insinuate," cried Lady Helen, pale with indignation, "but it shall not serve you. Edward has inherited from his father and from me that loathing and contempt for mummery and superstition, under every shape and form, which would alone preserve him from all your devices. Perhaps, with the ardour and inexperience of his age, he may allow his honest spirit of investigation to carry him too far at present; but his better judgment, which, Heaven be praised! he has resigned to no tool of Rome, will lead him again ere long to the right path."

"I trust so, Lady Helen."

"Indeed we are most grateful to you for your kind wishes," resumed her aunt; "but you must allow me to say, how desirable it would be that your horror and aversion for his heretical opinions should induce you to show a little more of maidenly reserve in your manners towards him."

"I, Lady Helen?"

"Yes, you, Cécile. It is not your uncle, but you whom I am addressing now, I presume."

"To be sure, Lady Helen; but I really could not bring myself to conceive that I had deserved this last reproof."

"Did I not think it merited, and very well merited too, I should not, I trust, have addressed it to you. I have had my eye upon you of late, more than you think, perhaps, and have observed very attentively all those whispering *à partés*."

"Then you must have perceived, Lady Helen, how anxious I always am not to prolong them."

"Indeed I have perceived no such thing; but what I have particularly remarked, I may as well tell you, is not a little more of shuffling and of manœuvring to sit by Edward at dinner than I should have thought quite seemly at your age. Well, what is this clasping of hands about now? Any one present, I should conceive, must have observed what

I am alluding to as well as I did. I am sure that you have, Sir Charles."

"Yes," cried the eager Cécile, "but his generous heart cannot have so cruelly misinterpreted what he saw. You well know," continued she, now addressing her uncle, "that notwithstanding all your kindness to me, I cannot feel quite as free, quite as much at home here, as if I were your real independent daughter. I must at times be over anxious, perhaps, not to—not to give any offence—any needless trouble. Hence, occasionally, some embarrassment, some outward hesitation, besides what may be going on within. When Lord St. Edmunds came, Conny wished me to sit by him, while I thought that she should be his neighbour rather than her brother's—"

The relenting Baronet was about to assent to this view, but he was again forestalled by the ever readier response of his spouse.

"I am sure that we are very much obliged to you indeed, Cécile, for your most considerate conduct; but I dare say that Constance will manage to secure for herself a fair portion of attention without any excess of self-sacrifice on your part. To resume, however, our former subject of your general bearing and manners of late, may I ask how the introduction of all these curls and ringlets can have coincided so precisely with Edward's return?"

"Simply, Lady Helen, because he joined with Conny and my uncle in perpetually charging me with purposely wearing my hair like a Madonna, and because they would have it that it would be more—more in character so."

"Exactly. Well, I am the last person in the world, God knows, who would make any invidious distinction respecting adventitious circumstances and prospects; and yet, I am not sure, to use your own expression, that it would not be more in character were the soberer and less flaunting style to be adopted by you, rather than by Constance. Of course, our opinions may differ on these points, as on many others; but I do not think, either, that, at your time of life, I should have considered it strictly modest or dignified to have appeared before a young man constantly decked out in his presents."

"Lady Helen, what can you mean?"

"Allow me to explain it to you, under correction, of course. This ring, if I mistake not," continued Lady Helen, slowly and smilingly laying her finger upon each of the de-

nounced articles, "this ring, I say, was given by Edward, so was this bracelet, so also was this gown. Why, if he had opened a charity-school, and you were one of the pupils, you could scarcely be more strictly clad in the garb of the establishment!"

There are times when our own unconscious misdeeds are, by the kind solicitude of others, placed before our eyes in such glowing and glaring colours, that we recoil from the stern reality as if it were a hideous creation of the nightmare. Thus it was at that moment, with the luckless Cécile. She started back in breathless terror, at first, from the baneful apparition; and then, as she slowly became aware that the lurid spectre was none but her own self, she felt each of the ill-fated presents burning and searing into her very flesh, as if the poisoned blood of Nessus itself had been infused into every link and into every fold. How gladly would she have torn and rent them from the scorching wounds, and have hurled them at the reviler's feet! but as such a proceeding could hardly have been considered more maidenly than the rest of her conduct, she found just endurance enough to remain silent and motionless until the first agony had somewhat subsided. What alleviation was then afforded did not proceed from Lady Helen.

"Keep your temper, keep your temper, pray!" said the exulting monitress. "These are subjects, I know, which are rather delicate, but there are times when they must be thoroughly investigated. If you have any observations to offer, we are most willing to hear them, provided, of course, they are stated in the tone and language that beseeem a young Englishwoman."

"To be sure, Mademoiselle," added the perplexed Baronet; "take it coolly; no offence is meant. We only want to come at the facts."

"Well, dear uncle, the facts are these," gasped out at length the exasperated Cécile. "This little ring was given to me by Edward, three years ago, as a new year's gift. The bracelet, you may remember, he brought from Paris last autumn, and he would establish a little raffle for it, which I won. Knowing how much too handsome it was for me, I was in despair at the time, and wished that we should have another throw for it; but you, Sir Charles, yourself prevented me. I remember your very words: 'Don't you be such a simpleton, Mademoiselle; now you

have got it, keep it, of course, and wear it night and day, till you have got tired of it.' With respect to the gown, I have nothing to say, to be sure, excepting that he insisted upon giving Conny and me one each, off the same piece, that both his sisters might, as he said, be dressed alike, and dear Conny would not hear of my refusing. These are all the presents that I have ever received from him, and it is quite inadvertently that I put them on together this morning."

"Oh, very well, very well!" replied the Baronet, somewhat moved. "I don't see much harm in all that. There is nothing that boys and girls like so much as making presents to each other. I can remember the day, Helen, when you weren't so very sorry yourself to receive one, however trifling—at least, so I then thought."

"I can remember it also, Sir Charles, and what it led to likewise."

"Ah, to be sure! but then, you know, this is a different case. Edward and Mademoiselle are cousins, after all, and it's natural enough, as she hasn't much pocket-money, that he should give her something pretty now and then."

"Yes; but I should say that it would be more natural still that she should apply to you or to me, when she wants anything of the kind."

"So I would have applied to you, my dear uncle!" exclaimed the indignant Cécile, "had not your generosity and that of others amply provided for all I can possibly require."

"Oh! very true," cried her aunt; "I had quite forgotten the magnificent annuity of her French relatives, though the twenty-five pounds have, I believe, been reduced to twenty, or, indeed, to nineteen since the last revolution."

"Never mind that, Helen—never mind that," interposed the Baronet, really annoyed. "They give as much as they can afford, poor devils! and what is a trifle in our eyes may be a real sacrifice to them."

"Very probably, Sir Charles; I have not the honour of their acquaintance, nor am I very ambitious of the advantage. What I must remember, however, in connection with them and our present subject is, that Cécile, saint though she may be, has had an early education, and has seen examples that may well put us on our guard with respect to her, now that she has arrived at years of discretion, or perhaps of indiscretion—"

"Lady Helen, what can you allude to?" interrupted the breathless Cécile.

"Don't you know? cannot you understand?" retorted the tormentor. "It is a pity your mother is not here to elucidate the mystery."

"My mother, oh! my poor mother," muttered Cécile, with a faint gasp. "You might have spared her who was always my idol."

"Your idol, as much as you please, so that she be not your model, at least, while you are under our roof."

"Oh! this is too, too cruel!" groaned the over-wrought Cécile, and, sinking down upon the couch by which she was standing, she hid her head in one of the cushions, and sobbed aloud.

This was an unexpected triumph for Lady Helen. Generally, during interviews of this description, Saint Cecilia, who was as proud as a whole clutch of peacocks, would succeed, however much the inward heart might bleed, in presenting a tolerably unmoved front to the galling attacks of the adversary, and sometimes even in repelling them with considerable effect. It was not until her own silent room was reached, and the door well closed upon her, that the untamed but sorely wounded spirit would find its relief in silent tears, or in some half-frantic invocation to the Patron Saint. On this occasion, however, Patience, and Fortitude, and Pride, were all overwhelmed in one common disaster, and the breaking heart throbbed with the fury of mediæval madness against its fetters.

Sir Charles Basinstoke had many of the faults, but not the faults only, of an English country gentleman. Nothing could be more uncongenial to his naturally generous and upright mind than the sight which he now beheld, and there was something of remorse, but more of indignation, in his tone, as he exclaimed:

"You need not have given that last thrust—Helen! upon my word, you needn't. It was no fault of hers if her mother went astray, and no reason on earth that she should do so too. Just see what a state she is in now."

"Don't be alarmed; don't be the least alarmed," replied his imperturbable wife, who well knew the deep respect which he entertained for her, and the almost boundless influence which she had acquired over him. "You think this is sorrow, perhaps; not a bit of it—it is all temper. Spite and rage, that we should deem a word

of warning, and guidance, to be occasionally necessary—nothing more. I am very glad to find, at all events, that what we have said has told a little, and that some of the wayward spirit is finding its way out. Nothing could be more beneficial, believe me.”

“Beneficial!—beneficial!” muttered Sir Charles; “it is a kind of doctoring that I don’t at all like. Whenever I speak to her, she minds all I say, and I have never broken her heart in this way—poor silly child that she is!”

“Oh! yes; that is all very well, but when you reprove her there is so much joking, and so forth, that it is hard to say whether you are in earnest or not. I happen to know where the shoe pinches; and if people choose to have pride and pretensions beyond their prospects, they must occasionally suffer for it. Go on until you have tired yourself, my dear,” continued Lady Helen, complacently addressing the still convulsed Cécile, “and, when you have exposed yourself to your heart’s content, perhaps you will think over what we have said, and shape your course accordingly. Remember, however, that I do not trust you, and be very cautious, or you will soon hear from me again, in the same style, or in one that may be even less to your liking.”

“Come, Helen, that’ll do,” interposed her husband, who was watching the progress of the execution with increased discomfort. “We can leave her there alone, poor child, and she will soon recover.”

“That she will, I make no doubt, and begin again too,” replied Lady Helen, most reluctantly preparing to follow Sir Charles; “but I have a word more for her yet. You will be pleased to bear in mind, Cécile, that if I expect your future intercourse with Edward to be reserved, as it should be, I shall not countenance, henceforth, over much intimacy with Constance either. I do not at all wish my children’s minds to be poisoned with foreign and Popish notions; and the less I see you with them, when I am not present, the better for yourself, as well as for them.”

At this crowning admonition, poor Cécile started up, as if the barbed words had inflicted no figurative wound, and, throwing herself at her uncle’s feet, exclaimed, with the native and impetuous eloquence of voice, of gesture, and of look which appertains to her alone:

“Did you hear that, Sir Charles Basin-stoke? Surely you will not suffer one who

bears your name, your own and only brother’s child, to be thus trampled upon. As I hope for the mercy of my Heavenly Father, I have never known any other feelings for Edward than those which I have avowed; and I can bear, without a sigh, any estrangement from him. But Conny and I are more than sisters—our hearts are one; they cannot be torn asunder. Who will dare to say that I have ever injured—that I ever could injure—her pure spotless mind? Let me wander through the wide world, until God calls me to Him again, but do not retain me here, merely that I should be thus branded in the eyes of all your household.”

“No, no, my dear, of course not, to be sure not,” replied the sorely perplexed Baronet, as he well nigh forcibly drew away his most unwilling spouse.

CHAPTER XII.

CONNY AND CÉCILE.

It chanced that just as these little family explanations were drawing to a close, St. Edmunds, who had been engaged in less animated but doubtless more agreeable discourse with his cousin Conny, in the library suddenly exclaimed:

“By Jove! there is a cat in the shrubbery, and an old offender too by his looks. I must go to Sir Charles for a gun.”

To the study he accordingly proceeded in all haste, but the gun, the cat, and the imperilled pheasants vanished from his thoughts in a second, when he beheld the sight which awaited him there.

“Gracious Heavens! Miss Cécile,” cried he, on recognising her still prostrate form, “what has happened? Shall I not call for some assistance?”

“No, no, it is nothing. Pray, pray, leave me,” replied she, grieved and annoyed in the extreme at being surprised in a moment of such unusual weakness.

We have already seen that our hero’s judgment would not entirely forsake him in a sudden emergency, and this he again exemplified, to our mind, on the present occasion, by returning immediately to the library to summon Constance.

“What is it, what can it be, Cécile dear?” cried the latter as she rushed into the room, and seated herself on the sofa by her cousin. “Have they been tormenting you again while my back was turned? This is too bad! Come, tell me all about it.”

“So I will, Conny, presently.”

St. Edmunds here felt the full gist of the proverbial expression that three are bad company, and, with a few muttered words of discretion, accomplished a dignified retreat.

"Read that article, Conny," continued Cécile, when alone with her cousin, "and you will easily guess the rest. Well, what do you think of it? Is it not a pity that such unmeaning falsehoods should make my uncle so wretched."

Constance fixed her keen blue eye full upon Cécile's face, and said :

"The pity to my view, darling, is, that it should be false."

"And yet," resumed Cécile, slightly smiling, "there is no truth in it, happily for all parties."

"Not for Edward, at all events."

"Yes, Conny, for Edward as well as for Sir Charles, for Lady Helen, for me, and even for you. Imagine for a moment the ceaseless discord that such a union would introduce into your happy family, and thank God, as I do, that we are spared this trial."

"You would not attempt to deceive Conny, I do think," said the latter little personage, again fixing her smiling eyes full upon the Saint.

"I trust that I should attempt to deceive no one, but when I do make my *début* in that line, perhaps I had better begin elsewhere. Seriously, darling, however precocious I may be, according to Lady Helen's account, I do not conceive that I could speak as I do now with regard to my feelings for Edward, were they any other than those of an affectionate and devoted sister. With you at all events, Conny, concealment or subterfuge would be useless; for my heart, which is yours, is all open before you."

"Very good," replied Constance, who is amazingly practical withal, "and now I don't see what we are to distress ourselves about."

"Indeed," answered Cécile sadly, "well may you scold me! I have been weak and foolish beyond all description, but there is always something in Lady Helen's words which wounds me cruelly."

"So I have remarked, dear Cécile, and I do wish that I could give you a little of my *sang-froid*."

"Ah! Conny, that is not in my nature. And, besides, you should remember how different our positions are."

"Now take care," said Conny, playfully raising her forefinger, "or I shall have to

begin too. You know that I never allow this sort of nonsense to be uttered before me."

"Well, I must be particularly careful at this moment," replied Cécile, in the same tone, "as I am in the greatest need of your favour. You will stand by me, Conny, in this emergency?"

"Of course, dear Cécile."

"Then you must tell Edward, kindly, but positively, the real, sober, homely truth, and entreat him, for the peace of the family and for mine, to set at rest, now and for ever, the anxieties which have visited me so severely to-day."

"I would rather bear another tale."

"No, Conny, you know now as well as I do that this is the only true one."

The conversation was here interrupted by the slow and cautious re-entrance of Sir Charles Basinstoke.

"Ah! you here, Conny!" exclaimed he at once, evidently much relieved on beholding her. "I have just been looking for you to bring you here."

"Indeed, and well you might, papa," said Conny laughing. "I hope that you are going to give me a proper account of all this business, and to explain how this precious child can have been found here, in your own study, actually crying her eyes out."

"Well," answered the Baronet, "I see by her face that it's all right again now. Perhaps we were a little too warm, Mademoiselle, and then my Lady does not mean, you know, all she says. Besides, who could have thought that you would have taken it so desperately to heart. Come, give me a kiss, child, and say that it is all over."

"Do no such thing, Cécile," said Constance; "it is a great deal more than he deserves."

This time, however, the wise Conny's advice was not followed, and the foolish Saint had again to dry her tears upon her uncle's shoulder.

That afternoon was a very busy one for Constance. Though she was much accused of being deficient in activity, still, somehow or another, whenever there was any business to be done at Redburn Hall, it went through her hands, and was by no means the worse for it. In this instance, she had first to encounter St. Edmunds, who having seen the article in the "Lincoln Chronicle," and having connected it with what he had beheld elsewhere, showed himself particularly solicitous to know how soon he might offer his

congratulations upon the forthcoming auspicious event. Who but Conny was to explain that the whole story was a fabrication; that there were reasons for not alluding to it in the family public; and that the best course for him at all events was to promote general conversation on other matters, as well as to show himself more attentive to Cécile than heretofore? Absolute compliance having been promised to her on this head, Conny adjourned to Lady Helen's room, and there administered, with her own inimitable assurance, a very severe reprimand, which the indulgent parent smilingly bore, but which, we fear, did not avail her much. This duty accomplished, Constance sought out Sir Charles himself. She very seriously admonished him, too, with respect to his recent language and conduct towards Cécile, and informed him that if a totally new leaf were not turned over, he must expect to see her run away some morning from the house, to enlist for a soldier, or for some other desperate purpose. Finally she went to Edward himself, and very distinctly delivered his cousin's message to him. Here, however, she no longer found the same docile and deferential listener. Her brother treated her interference in the matter as impertinent and uncalled for in the extreme; but Conny was not to be deterred from carrying out her purpose by any such casual little compliments, until all that she deemed it necessary to impart had been fully and clearly stated. She then betook herself to her own sitting-room, addressed to Dandy her opinion upon his attractions, in terms which must have gratified even his ultra-tropical vanity, and finally conceiving herself to be much exhausted, though certainly none ever looked less so, she sank back into her Sutherland arm-chair, and refreshed herself by an intense study of a very abstruse theological work.

It was not until late in the afternoon, that Edward found an opportunity of exchanging a few words with Cécile, unobserved by any one saving his discreet little sister, who took care to look another way, while she listened with the utmost intensity of her powers.

"Your message has been delivered to me, Cécile," whispered he, rather sternly, "but I am not exactly sure that I should be grateful for it."

"Grateful! no, indeed, Edward," muttered poor Cécile, in a sad flutter. "A sister's affection can call for no gratitude."

"Particularly, when the term is used re-

strictively, as it is, I am assured, in this case, Cécile."

She fixed her earnest gaze upon him, and deliberately replied:

"Edward, you have not been misinformed."

"But I suppose the feelings that exist on one side are not absolutely to regulate those that may arise on the other?"

"Yes, Edward, they must, they will, or there is an end to the happiness of this happy home."

"There are other homes in the wide world besides this one, Cécile."

"None for you, Edward, and none, I trust, for me either, so long as I may honourably and fearlessly claim a shelter at Redburn."

There was no mistaking the purport of this last appeal, however indirect and guarded in its terms, and it struck very forcibly upon Edward's heart. During the whole evening he remained singularly quiescent and abstracted, and early on the ensuing morning he took his departure for London, having often experienced that change of air and scene were excellent remedies for the indisposition under which he laboured, as for many others, when still in their earliest stage.

Perhaps it may appear strange that the Lord Viscount St. Edmunds, Royal Horse Guards Red, who had now been residing, far beyond the appointed time, at what he had been pleased to designate the slowest house in all England, should not have deemed this a very fair opportunity for likewise accomplishing his retreat. He, however, thought otherwise. Whether the chief attraction was found in the excellent condition of the covers, the amenity of Lady Helen's disposition, the exalted and enlarged views of Sir Charles Basinstoke himself, or the charm of his fair cousin's society, we cannot undertake precisely to determine. Certain it is, at all events, that though his departure seemed indefinitely postponed, he showed himself perfectly resigned to his new style of life.

It chanced that, a very few days after his cousin's departure, our hero entered, in quest of a missing newspaper, the small print-room adjoining the library, where Constance and Cécile were wont to spend a great portion of their time together. On this occasion, the retiro was untenanted, but apparently it had not been long so, for, on the table, a sketch was lying, which immediately attracted the intruder's attention. It represented an Ama-

zon on horseback, to a certain extent similar in attitude to that of the unmentionable German, but differing widely from it, insomuch that the warlike maiden's antagonist was not a raging wild beast, but a sorely wounded Parthian youth. So deeply was St. Edmunds engaged in the contemplation of this drawing, that he did not hear a light step behind him, until the voice of the startled Cécile reached him as she exclaimed :

"Holy Virgin ! our poor Amazon."

"My dear Miss Basinstoke, I hope that I have been guilty of no indiscretion."

"Your cousin Conny will be here presently," replied Cécile, endeavouring to suppress a slight smile, "and you had better ask her what she thinks upon the matter."

"Is this sketch hers?"

"It does not signify if it is hers or another person's. What I am alluding to is the invasion of our retreat, and its present consequences."

"And you think Constance will scold me more effectually than you could?"

"As your cousin, she has a right to do so, which I may not claim."

"Well, it cannot be helped, Miss Basinstoke. Now that I have seen this drawing, which, by the by, was lying fully exposed on the table, I must tell you how charming, how beautiful it is."

"You know that you will not mend matters by paying such unmerited compliments," replied Cécile, stretching out her fairy hand to recover the sequestered offspring of her fancy.

"Then must I attempt to ingratiate myself by a word of criticism. Will that be more patiently endured?"

"Unquestionably."

"But first may I ask, Miss Basinstoke, for what the design is intended?"

"As a pattern for Conny's tapestry work ; that is, of course, if it succeeds at all. But pray let me hear your critical remarks."

"Well but, Miss Basinstoke, I must first state, in extenuation of the suggestion, that, though I draw a little, my observation will point to what is far more within my province. I have had a good deal of theoretical practice in the noble art of cutting and thrusting, and I must tell you that, beautiful as the composition and general attitude of the group decidedly are, the heroine will scarcely accomplish her victory. See, her adversary is fearfully wounded. As he is reclining on his knees, the fore-hoofs of her horse are even

now dashing against his brow ; a second more, and they must bear him to the ground. Now, it seems to me that too much strength is thrown into the left arm, as if she were endeavouring to restrain her furious courser, while the right arm is wielding the spear with less assurance than might beseem so intrepid a combatant. That weapon will deal no death-stroke, Miss Basinstoke."

"Are you sure that one is intended?" muttered Cécile, without raising her eyes. "Look again."

Thus admonished, the critic gazed more intently upon the sketch, and then the true spirit of the conception dawned more clearly upon him.

"Ah!" resumed he musingly, "I had indeed completely mistaken the purport. The left hand is most designedly reining in the ruthless charger ; the right arm is all unwilling to strike. Now that I look more closely into the lovely countenance, there is a smile of pity, nay more, a thrill of anguish there, which explains all, and well corresponds with the whole attitude. Still, perhaps it would be more merciful, Miss Basinstoke, to give a finishing thrust where so fearful a wound has already been dealt."

"The heroine may not be the accomplished warrior that you think. You can perceive that her antagonist's wound proceeds, not from a spear, but from a winged shaft, which must have been cast by some strange and distant hand. Lord St. Edmunds," added she, more earnestly, "pray return me my drawing ; really it is not yet finished."

"Though you have betrayed your secret," replied he, "I cannot relinquish my investigation so soon. Indeed, I have hardly looked at the adversary yet. Strange that there should be a smile of triumph upon his lips in all the agony of that hour ; and yet, not so strange either."

"What, you a soldier !" said Cécile, "and feel neither shame nor pity for the warrior who is dying by a woman's hand?"

"I feel what he looks, Miss Basinstoke, and you can best tell whether shame and sorrow are uppermost in his heart as he bids this hasty farewell to life."

These reflections were here interrupted by the sudden entrance of Constance, most opportunely, as we deem, for it is perfectly surprising, as Sir Charles Basinstoke would often say, what nonsense girls and boys will talk when they are left alone together. Indeed, we should scarcely have felt ourselves justi-

fied in introducing the foregoing little dialogue, did it not tend to show that our Cinderella is no less proficient in the accomplishment of drawing than in that of music. That she is likewise an adept in the other sister-art, we shall, in due time, have also occasion to illustrate.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WELCOME VISITOR.

WE should here mention, among the attractions presented by the *séjour* at Redburn Hall, the expected arrival of Lady Templedale, a most intimate friend of the whole family, as she is to all those who have the pleasure of her acquaintance. Who is so agreeable, who is so pleasant, who is so sensible, who is so well-informed as Lady Templedale? Very few indeed whom we know! When she appears in a country-house, it always has seemed to us as if an indefinite amount of convivial entertainment and pleasure were unpacked with her imperial and bonnet-case, and was diffused at once throughout the precincts.

Who is going to be married to who? who is in love with who? who has quarrelled with who? who is behaving lamentably ill with who? Lady Templedale knows it all, writes it all, tells it all—never ill-naturedly, mind, but in such a manner as to excite the acutest interest, and to impart the intensest amusement. She is a politician, too, and reckoned very sagacious in that line also, we are told; but our province lying by no means in that direction, the less we refer to her eminence on this head the better, or we might betray our own incompetency. As much, or rather as little, must we say respecting her qualifications as a controversialist, merely stating that we have always observed the extraordinary equanimity of her discussion, as well as the great candour and sincerity with which she will ever labour distinctly to ascertain the true opinions and sentiments of others.

It is not very surprising that the appearance of such a personage should at once have dispelled the clouds which had been overshadowing of late the serener atmosphere of Redburn Hall. At the very first glance, Lady Templedale saw and knew all about it, and proceeded to business accordingly. Sir Charles Basinstoke was informed that his son's position, and his own, had never been better in the county; Lady Helen, that Edward had been heard of in London, looking in very good spirits, and by no means as if

he had lost the most important organ of the human frame; Cécile, that the outcry against the Catholics, while fatal of course to the body at large, could only render each individual member more interesting. Cheerfulness having thus been restored where it had somewhat failed, the whole party was accused of looking shockingly moped; neighbours were inquired for in such terms as to render their immediate invitation imperative; and a considerable accession of spirits being thus procured, music, singing, riding, driving, and even dancing, became the successive orders of the day, and almost of the night likewise.

This new *régime*, while perfectly successful in general, was not very favourable to Lady Helen alone. It debarred her from meditating, to her heart's content, upon the full rigour of the forthcoming Parliamentary enactment, and also from bestowing upon Cécile's imperfections that amount of hourly admonition which really could not be withheld in justice to her future prospects. Nay, more, so keenly did the provident aunt feel the absurdity of seeing a superstitious and idolatrous girl, without a penny in the world, saving what might be granted by the charity of her relatives, herself singing, laughing, dancing, and actually noticed by others, as if there were nothing extraordinary and almost revolting in her position, that Lady Helen's excellent health was itself slightly affected, and she was constrained to keep her room for a day or two with a violent migraine. Her absence, however, thanks to the increased assiduity of Lady Templedale, in nowise cast any uncalled-for gloom upon the forsaken party. Indeed, we should be inclined to imagine the very reverse, since their excitement on one of these evenings reached to such a point, that Cécile, ay, the above-described Saint Cecilia herself, was seen to join, not only in the quadrilles, but actually in the valse itself.

To be sure, Conny was the first partner, but ere the fair cousins had accomplished a single turn, they were forcibly arrested by Lady Templedale, closely followed by all the young men present.

"This won't do, you know, this won't do at all," exclaimed the former. "Each of you two young ladies will be pleased to accept a proper partner without a moment's delay."

Conny, who, we are bound to say, is always very docile and obedient when her own inclinations are not interfered with, immediately complied with the behest, but it was not so with the naturally rebellious Cécile. She

protested that properly, or perhaps, as some may think, improperly speaking, she never had valsed, and, indeed, could not valse.

"You story-telling little Papist," rejoined Lady Templedale, "have we not just had the contrary demonstration under our very eyes; though, by the by, in your judgment, this may be no disproof."

"I can appeal to no supernatural agency in this case," replied Cécile, laughing, and blushing slightly, "yet I can truly affirm that I never have valsed—really—in short, with any one but Conny."

"You could not give a better reason for beginning this very instant. Is it not exactly the same thing, you silly child, or, at least, the same step? Now, Lord St. Edmunds, have you nothing to add?"

"Most undoubtedly, Lady Templedale," answered our hero, "I have to solicit, as a personal favour, the compliance which you urge so well."

"But what do you think Lady Helen would say?" objected the still irresolute Cécile.

"I am her representative for to-night, Miss Argument, and, as such, I command you to begin at once."

A second more, and St. Edmunds's arm encompassed the waist of the Saint, his hand closed upon hers, and Lady Templedale's orders were fully carried out. Nor had she any reason to regret their imperious enforcement, for never were two more appropriate partners united in that fascinating dance. Upon St. Edmunds's reputation, which was long before established, we need not dwell; but it was singular to observe how surpassing was the excellence of Cécile's *début*. Each shade, and strain, and modulation of the music seemed ever blending, in electric harmony, not only with her step, but with every gentle wave of her hair, of her dress, of her pliant figure, until all present doubted whether Terpsichore herself had not visited, for one fleeting hour, her votive throng.

"Well, Miss Cécile," exclaimed the Life-Guardsman, when adjured by his breathless companion to pause for a second, "I have valsed with a pretty considerable number of young ladies, but never with such a partner as you. Is it possible that Conny has been your only instructor?"

"Yes, or rather my only accomplice, as Lady Helen does not much approve of valsing."

"Some people, you know, are six whole months before they can even learn the step."

"Indeed? They must be rather obtuse, I should think," replied the laughing Cécile. "I never could see the difficulty of learning any dance."

"You have been to a ball, sometimes, of course?"

"Once only."

"And did you not enjoy it?"

"Oh! more than I can say."

"Then, why did you never go to another?"

"Because," replied Cécile, smiling, "because Lady Helen thought that I had over-excited myself, and that one who is not stronger than I am had much better stay at home."

"I wish we had you out in London for a season, that's all. But I suppose you have never thought of such a thing as that, Miss Cécile?"

"Oh! no, never," replied she, laughing. And again they started, and again they moved round as gracefully, even more gracefully than before, until the music ceased, and they were constrained to cease likewise.

Later in the evening Cécile was obliged to accept another partner from the hands of Lady Templedale, but young Thornhill's rustic aptitude was only such as to convey to her a first impression of the disappointments from which even a ball-room is not wholly exempt. Ere long, she had most unfeignedly to declare that she was too much tired to continue, and her disconsolate danseur had the not very unusual satisfaction of standing by her chair until the music was silenced again.

Our hero, who, much to the detriment of his moustache, had been intently scrutinizing these proceedings, now approached her again, and, seating himself at her side, entered into a detailed account of the different and conflicting charms attributable to the leading London beauties. Cécile listened with undisguised interest as the varied loveliness of Lady Emily de Burgh, Lady Adeliza Howard, or Lady Clementina Villiers was contrasted with the more majestic beauty of Lady Maidstone, Lady Waterford, or Lady Douro; the ever attractive dignity of Lady Ailesbury with the retiring gracefulness of Lady Newport. There is a nameless fascination in the more exalted circles of all society which, while those who have forsaken them cannot wholly forget, those who are as yet strangers to them will themselves experience. As St. Edmunds spoke, it seemed to Cécile, the serious, the reflective Saint Cecilia herself, as if a new world were expanding before her, all radiant

with the halo of distinction and of fashion ; and so far was she insensibly borne into the dream-land of her fancy, that she scarcely distinguished her neighbour's words as, with a not unfaltering voice, he whispered, in conclusion to his aristocratical synopsis :

"Yes, I have seen the exterior form of beauty often enough in London ; but I had never known its full enchantment until I came to Redburn."

"I am not at all surprised to hear it," replied his artless neighbour. "Though our Conny is a match for any or all of them in a ball-room, no one can tell half her charm until they have seen her at home."

"Oh! to be sure, to be sure," resumed St. Edmunds, hastily recurring to his moustache as if surprised, and yet relieved also by this assent to what, no doubt, may have been the purport of his former observation ; "nobody is prettier or better in a way than Constance, and yet—"

"And yet," interrupted Cécile hastily, her beaming but tremulous eye well denoting that some sudden and startling consciousness had broken upon her absent mind, "and yet, see the infliction which is awaiting her. Lord St. Edmunds, you cannot, you must not allow her to valse with Mr. Thornhill. Surely you have neglected her immoderately to-night."

"Not so much as you may think, Miss Cécile, for I have received her distinct commands to pay my respects more particularly to you, and you know that my foremost duty is to obey orders."

"Then I trust that you will comply with mine, and rescue your luckless cousin at once from her present emergency."

There was something so earnest in the speaker's voice, that our hero was almost sympathetically constrained to submit ; and yet he could not but urge that most probably the order would be diametrically reversed by Constance.

"Then you must disobey this time," said Cécile gravely.

"Why so, Miss Basinstoke?"

"Because," muttered she, "because, in short, it was surely not to sit so long by a Catholic orphan girl, that Lord St. Edmunds undertook the Lincolnshire pilgrimage."

"I am not aware," replied our astonished hero, "that I had any particular object in coming here, saving a mere visit of courtesy."

"Oh! you know best of course," said Cécile, rising to join, at the tea-table, her more matronly neighbours.

St. Edmunds also rose at the same time, but so deep was the reflective mood into which the last words of his fair neighbour had cast him, that he remained, for many minutes, an almost unconscious spectator of the gay movement around him. At length his eyes fell upon the radiant beauty of the laughing Constance. Could it be so indeed? Had the long-expected, the long-urged visit some definite object, in the mind of its promoters, if not in his own, and was that object no other than that of his father's recent and most earnest solicitude? Constance was as amiable as she was lovely ; her fortune, as an only younger child, was considerable ; her birth and station well beseeemed her other advantages. Was it surprising that Lord Tewkesbury and his sister, who had always remained faithful to their earlier affection, should have devised a union which boded so much satisfaction to their own feelings, so much happiness to those whose welfare it still more immediately concerned? Who could have gazed upon Constance Basinstoke as she then stood, smiling in all the guileless consciousness of her youthful charms, and marked her with indifference for his appointed bride? No wonder that our hero's look so long remained fixed upon her alone. No wonder that when at length it was withdrawn, when it fell once more upon the humble and dependant Cécile, seated as she was again at her allotted place by the tea-table, he should have breathed so deep a sigh! Many a one, less thoughtful than St. Edmunds was in his actual mood, had paid before and would again pay this fleeting tribute to the contrasted darkness of the poor Papist's promised destiny.

That evening being Saturday, when the clock struck twelve, the noisier pleasures were duly brought to a close, and, soon afterwards, the whole party broke up, the Thornhills and other neighbours retiring to their respective homes.

"Well, it is not for long that we are parting at all events, that is a comfort," said Lady Templedale, as the farewell compliments were exchanged. "We are all to meet again at Moorlands, on Monday, are we not?"

"Indeed, we shall most anxiously expect you," replied young Thornhill.

"Weather permitting, of course," exclaimed Constance, who on a wet day likes nothing so well as her fire-side.

"Hold your tongue, you lazy monkey," interposed Lady Templedale. "Don't anticipate disappointments ; it is sure to be fine, isn't

it, Cécile, you who are weather-wise as well as wise in every other way. Come, give us a favourable augury."

"Indeed I do not know what to say," answered the Saint. "We have a new moon to-morrow afternoon, and Herschel—"

"Never mind Herschel. What can he know more than we do about it. Just look at the glass, Lord St. Edmunds; I am sure it is going up."

"Well, perhaps it is a little, Lady Templedale," replied our hero, after a minute investigation.

"Ah!" said Cécile smiling, "one credulity overthrown merely to be replaced by another. You must not be surprised if I still adhere to the moon, the older and the loftier guide."

"Very well, pray do," cried Lady Templedale. "And you, Lord St. Edmunds, who are fond of betting, I have heard, must uphold the honour of the glass. I would give something considerable myself, could this obstinate little Romanist be, for once, positively convicted of error. What say you, Mrs. Herschel will you wager against the glass?"

"Yes, Lady Templedale, I will."

"How much?"

"A shilling, that it will rain on Monday."

"And a shilling that it will not, that's a bargain," cried St. Edmunds and Lady Templedale together.

This important matter having been thus disposed of, the still lingering neighbours took their final farewell of Redburn Hall, and its inmates retired to their much-required rest.

Lady Helen was sufficiently recovered on the ensuing day to assist at the afternoon service, and to appear at dinner; but, exhausted by this double effort, she withdrew to her room at a very early hour. Her re-appearance was not, however, the principal incident which was to mark the course of that Sunday for Cécile Basinstoke. Soon after Church time, Lady Templedale had asked her what she thought of Cardinal Wiseman's paper, not the original cosmographic pastoral, but the subsequent appeal to the people of England. She had replied, with perfect sincerity, that she was not even aware of its existence, a fact subsequently accounted for when it became known that Lady Helen had ordered the immediate destruction of every newspaper which had contained or commented upon the document. A copy of it was thereupon produced by Lady Templedale, and secretly intrusted to the ardent Saint, who forthwith

retired with it to her own room, which she did not forsake again until every line had been eagerly devoured. The effect which so eloquent a vindication of her own impassioned convictions and sentiments was calculated to produce upon Cécile's fervent and impulsive spirit, we need not attempt to define. Suffice it to say, that though she was more than usually silent and abstracted during dinner, there was a fevered lustre in her eyes, which all must have remarked, and which, at all events, as we shall presently have to show, did not escape the ever watchful attention of Lady Templedale.

But here, gentle reader, we should warn you that if you are not a theologian, you would do very well to pass over the two following chapters; and indeed, if you are a theologian, you would perhaps do better still to avoid them, as none of the parties whom we have introduced to you were qualified, after all, to descant so freely upon such serious and complicated matter. As for ourselves, being merely narrators of the occurrences of Redburn Hall, we deem it a duty to suppress nought of what strictly appertains to our tale, leaving to each and all the entire and undisputed credit or discredit of their respective opinions and assertions.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FORBIDDEN SUBJECT INTRODUCED.

THE family prayers were read at an earlier hour than usual, that Lady Helen might assist at them ere she retired; the remainder of the party then returned to the library, where they entered into general conversation with the master of the house. Soon observing, however, that her uncle was on the eve of resuming his interrupted slumbers, Cécile slipped quietly away to the adjoining print-room, that she might again devote herself to a book, which she had been previously reading with the intensest interest; but her seclusion was not so unmolested as she had hoped. Ere ten minutes had elapsed, it was summarily invaded by Lady Templedale, Constance, and St. Edmunds, in a body.

"Oh! here is the runaway," cried the former; "I thought that we should find her poring over some dusty volume. We have a question to ask of your Saintship."

"What may that be?" inquired the unsuspecting Cécile.

"Simply, whether or not you believe in this winking Virgin, that the foreign papers are so full of?"

"Indeed, Lady Templedale, I cannot say; I am not sufficiently aware of the circumstances," answered the Saint, calmly resuming her book.

"This won't do, my dear," rejoined Lady Templedale, taking forcible possession of the volume. "I give you fair warning; we are come here to have what Edward calls a wrangle—and a wrangle we will have."

"You are most welcome," said Cécile, laughing; "but you must allow me to retire, as I could only be in the way."

"Don't pretend to misunderstand us, you little hypocrite; you know very well that you are already retained on the other side. Stop her, Lord St. Edmunds; don't let her presume to run away! Ah! now, that we have caught you, you will be pleased to sit down again immediately; and mind that you don't stir a step, or we shall have to tie you to your chair."

"But this is actual persecution, my dear Lady Templedale."

"And pray, why not, my dear Saint Cecilia? We, Protestants, have a long arrear to work out; and it is high time that we should have a little inquisition of our own."

"Ah! but Lady Templedale," urged Cécile, more seriously, "I do beseech you to remember that I am under a solemn promise to Lady Helen not to discuss religious questions in her house. Am I not, dearest Conny?"

"Not that I am aware of," replied her laughing cousin; "the only engagement, I believe, is, that you should not attempt to convert any of us."

"Any of you, perhaps," resumed the determined Lady Templedale; "but no provision whatever was made for me, or for Lord St. Edmunds. The fact is, my dear, that there are certain questions, respecting your faith, which I am anxious to have solved for me. I beg your pardon; I know what you are going to say. There are plenty of books upon the subject, of course, but I have neither time nor attention for the study of them. There are, also, many learned men, who could enlighten me, but it so happens that I am by no means desirous of losing my fair fame, and perhaps my heart also, by closeting myself with them. No, no; you need not appeal again to Conny. It was she herself who told me that you should prove to me how the self-same person can be a sensible and a sincere Roman Catholic. This demonstration you are now to afford forthwith, as it

was for no other purpose than fully to arouse the Popish spirit within you, that I lent you your new Cardinal's appeal, which, by-the-by, I have not yet had time to read. Come, tell us at once, do you believe in the blinking Virgin or not? You know that I am sure to carry my point in the end."

"I know it, indeed, my dear Lady Templedale," answered Cécile, smiling despite her unfeigned anxiety; "but I have already replied, that I really have no opinion on the subject."

"Nonsense, child; you must have some standard by which to test these questions."

"I trust I have."

"Well, what is it?"

"May I first ask, Lady Templedale, what is yours?"

"Certainly not; you will have quite enough to do, I can tell you, to vindicate your own little idolatrous self, without attempting to perplex others. Come, what is your standard, respecting the credibility of miracles?"

"The decision of the Church in each special case."

"So that if the Pope were to declare that the eyes winked, you would believe that they did wink?"

"Unquestionably."

"And you say, Conny, that we are not to call that superstition?"

"I say nothing, dear Lady Templedale," replied the afore-named little personage, somewhat perplexed.

"Superstition!" resumed Cécile, pensively; "will you define that term, at least, Lady Templedale?"

"No; but you may."

"If I say that it is the belief in what may not be proved to our own senses by their natural and customary evidences, will that do?"

"I suppose the definition may pass, for want of a better."

"Well then, Lady Templedale, should not we all, who are not absolute and professed rationalists, be careful how we invidiously apply the term to our neighbours' faith? You reverently adhere to a religion which has its mysteries, as obscure, as supernatural as our own; you reject, as absolutely as we do, the test of human and individual reason; you are assailed, as bitterly as we are, by its votaries. Can you show too much indulgence to a principle which is the very groundwork of your belief, as of ours?"

"Take care, my dear, take care," observed

Lady Templedale. "Remember that we have forsworn, as unworthy of reverence, those very points which we have regarded as unduly and immoderately taxing the credulity of the laity."

"Which you, as a sect, have considered as such, dear Lady Templedale: but how will you preserve those very articles of faith which you still uphold from a precisely similar doom at the hands of others? Looking merely to the doctrines which we as yet profess in common—the fearful penalty entailed, by the disobedience of one, upon unborn generations, the Triple Nature of the Godhead, the whole mystery of Redemption, nay, even the belief in Divine Revelation itself—are they not also daily and hourly rejected, by countless sects, as taxing overmuch the credulity of the vulgar? Would you kindly lend me for a moment the book which I was reading just now? the very passage that I had under my eyes, when you entered will partly bear me out in what I am stating."

"Your book, my dear? here it is. Gracious Heaven! it is the 'Emile' of Rousseau! Are you allowed to read such works as these?"

"I am, Lady Templedale."

"That is very strange."

"Not so strange as you may think. Had it been my fate to live in some of those neighbouring lands, where my faith would be that of all who have one, and assailed by infidelity alone, how content should I have been meekly to have joined in the universal worship and reverence, without attempting to reconcile my reason to its appointed subjection. It is otherwise here. When all that I and the Catholic World hold to be most sacred is constantly derided and reviled by the greatest, the most respected, the most devout, I could not have felt what I feel, and have remained all-unconscious and all-impassive. I was driven, in mere self-defence, to inquire, to study, to judge more—far more than is usual at my age or in my creed. It has been an evil, no doubt, but I trust the lesser in the choice."

"I hope that it may prove so, my dear; here is your book."

"I was saying," resumed Cécile, "that the fundamental doctrine of all religion, that of Divine Revelation, is rejected too often by the very principle and in the very terms which you have applied to what you deem to be my credulity. See how that doctrine is discussed here:

"'Apôtres de la vérité, qu'avez-vous donc à me dire dont je ne reste pas le juge? Dieu lui-même a parlé: écoutez sa révélation. C'est autre chose. Dieu a parlé. Voilà certes un grand mot. Et à qui a-t-il parlé? Il a parlé aux hommes. Pourquoi donc n'en ai-je rien entendu? Il a chargé d'autres hommes de nous rendre sa parole. J'entends: ce sont des hommes qui vont me dire ce que Dieu a dit. J'aimerois mieux avoir entendu Dieu lui-même; il ne lui en aurait pas coûté davantage et j'aurois été à l'abri de la séduction. Il vous en garantit en manifestant la mission de ses envoyés. Comment cela? Par des prodiges. Et où sont ces prodiges? Dans les livres. Et qui a fait ces livres? Des hommes. Et qui a vu ces prodiges? Des hommes qui les attestent. Quoi, toujours des témoignages humains! toujours des hommes qui me rapportent ce que d'autres hommes ont rapporté! que d'hommes entre Dieu et moi!'"

"Poor, forlorn, misguided man!" resumed Cécile, closing the book; "is not he taxing overmuch my credulity when he calls upon me to reject every faith and every hope, which is not conveyed to me by some incontrovertible manifestation of Divine agency? when he condemns the anxious spirit within me to remain desolate evermore, except its hearth be kindled by the Hand of Omnipotence itself? And yet, dear Lady Templedale, these are not any extreme or very remote consequences of your principle."

"Well, but, my dear child, tell me again what your principle is, and let us see to what it may also lead."

"I will presently," said Cécile, rising; "but I have yet something to show you, which I was reading no later than yesterday. Don't be afraid," added she, smiling, "I am not going to run away from you, but I must fetch one of the papers which is still, I believe, in the library."

She very shortly returned with an open newspaper in her hand.

"It would appear," she resumed, "upon the authority of the 'China Mail,' that some Christian missionaries having made several proselytes in the Principality of Canton, a certain Wan, governor or prefect of the province, described as a man of great literary attainments, has issued a proclamation against them. He sets forth that, so long as these foreigners are satisfied to adhere among themselves to their peculiar tenets and forms of worship, nothing is to be said. But they

cannot be allowed to introduce themselves into the Celestial Empire that they may preach such doctrines, and the subjects of that empire, who have leagued themselves with these foreigners to disturb the minds of the people, and to seduce them from the simple and rational faith of their forefathers, are manifestly violating the ancient laws of the kingdom. The proclamation is a very long one; you can read it over at your leisure, if you please; but which, should you say, are the very articles of faith that are most bitterly reviled, as unworthy of all countenance in a civilized community?"

"Well, transubstantiation, perhaps, or the worship of images, or belief in the infallibility of a mortal man."

"No," replied Cécile smiling, "not one of these tenets is alluded to, as denoting the utter worthlessness of the foreign superstition. It is our common doctrines respecting the fallen nature of man, his redemption, his salvation through faith, which are stigmatized and derided as our most palpable impostures."

"Very possibly, my dear; but I do not exactly see the bearing of all this upon our original question. I do not pretend that we are not all of us rather too liberal in the application of the term superstition to our neighbour's belief; but though no faith admits of absolute demonstration, can we entirely resign our judgment, limited and insufficient as it may be?"

"Not resign, dear Lady Templedale, but incline. Were I to witness myself any preternatural effect or result, I own that I should be very much disposed to conjecture rather that I was myself deluded or deceived than that the great and constant laws of nature were violated. The same most obvious interpretation would apply, more strongly still, to signs and wonders reported to me on the authority of others, and yet I cannot forget that I may thus be led also to explain away, in a precisely similar manner, the very evidences upon which the Divine origin of our faith must ever rest. What shall be my resource against this utter scepticism on one hand, and the blindest credulity on the other? I see no safer nor surer refuge than that which I claimed for myself in the outset, the authority of the Church, discerning now, as in the earlier ages, between the impostures and extravagancies of man and the true manifestations from above."

"Yes, my dear; but we draw a distinc-

tion between the inspired ages and our own."

"The result of which is, I suppose, Lady Templedale, that we are to disbelieve all miracles that we see, and believe merely in those that we hear of."

"No, Mrs. Jesuit; but we are not called upon to contest those which were witnessed by an entire population, and have been recorded by the holiest of men."

"As to the opinions of the Jewish population at large," observed Cécile, "I fear that they would stand in array rather against than in favour of our credence. Your other test, the record of holy and heaven-directed men, is to my mind the only true one, but in what does it differ from mine?"

"Simply, my dear, because we are not at all disposed to place the same reliance in one of your Priests or Pontiffs, as in the Holy Apostles or the earlier Fathers of the Church."

"That is a distinction that each may draw for himself, but which he may find it difficult to impose upon others. You were speaking of the inspired ages just now, Lady Templedale; can you tell me when they commence and when they end?"

"Not exactly, my dear, but I suppose that Churchmen can."

"It matters not," resumed Cécile. "You hold, at all events, that there were by-gone times whose partial or general belief is more binding upon us than that of our own. I will not inquire whether, in those days, signs and wonders were not so universally expected as to render the beholders less critical, and consequently more liable to error than ourselves. I will readily admit that some periods have been more manifestly favoured than others by preternatural testimonies of the Divine countenance, but these, we hold and trust, never have been, and never will be, entirely withheld from the Church of Christ."

"Yet surely, dear Cécile," interposed Constance, "the age that was visited by the Redeemer himself—the Apostles whom he himself called, and with whom he held personal communion, may well be esteemed pre-eminently holy?"

"Pre-eminently, no doubt, my darling child, but not exclusively. You would not impugn the testimony of Paul, whom you so much reverence—of two among the Evangelists—of many others whom you still designate as Saints, upon that very authority of the Church which you so indignantly reject in other matters; you would not, I

say, impugn their testimony because they are not held to have been so far blessed as to have seen Christ himself. No," continued Cécile, in a low musing tone, "the more I have reflected upon the fatal differences which have so cruelly estranged us, the more I have reduced them to one alone as to the origin of all. You believe that after a certain and undefined period, all Spiritual guidance from above was withdrawn from the Church, while we hold that it was promised to her and will be vouchsafed to her evermore."

"It may be, my dear; but at all events we have thus exempted ourselves from the duty of believing in transubstantiation, the infallibility of the Pope, and other mysteries somewhat too abstruse for our homely British understandings."

"It is singular, at all events," remarked Cécile smiling, "that the very two which you have specified are those in which we are no less clearly borne out by the Holy Text than by the undeviating authority of the Church and the still unimpaired assent of the majority."

"The two last arguments, my dear, have not, as you know, great weight with us. With respect to the texts that you can doubtless invoke, you must remember how dangerous it may be to interpret too literally what was spoken in an essentially figurative tongue."

"No doubt, Lady Templedale, but recollect also, how freely the mysterious truths to which you most reverently adhere are disposed of by others as mere oriental metaphors."

"I must admit, most learned Saint, that we have some little differences to settle with the Unitarians upon that head; but that is not the question at issue between us. What I want to hear more about is the Pope, who, at all events, is the leading subject, if he is not the supreme ruler, in England now. Do explain to me, once for all, to what extent and under what conditions you recognise his infallible authority. I dare say that you have some very plausible and indeed some very philosophical exposition of the tenet to offer, if we are to judge from what we have already heard."

"You have already heard a great deal too much, dear Lady Templedale," replied Cécile laughing; "it is twelve o'clock, and surely I may be released now."

"By no means, my dear; pray sit down again instantly, and explain to us all about his Holiness."

CHAPTER XV.

THE FORBIDDEN SUBJECT CONTINUED.

THE Saint having been constrained to resume her seat, and the latter question having been again repeated, she replied:

"We hold, as I have already said, that some heavenly guidance is vouchsafed for ever to the Christian world, and we believe that divine inspiration especially to rest upon the successors of St. Peter. Hence the authority, supreme in Spiritual matters, to which all the Catholic communities still yield their willing obedience, not as to the infallibility of any mortal man, but as to the promised direction from above, never failing the Church in the hour of her need."

"Very good; but what I wish to understand, is whether this authority is vested in the Pope alone, or in Councils alone, or in the assent of both?"

"That I believe to depend very much upon the nature and importance of the matter at issue. The question is a very intricate one, nor can I pretend satisfactorily to solve it."

"Indeed I think you had better leave it alone," said Lady Templedale laughing, "and we also, my dear."

"Don't misunderstand me," resumed Cécile in the same tone. "Because the highest authorities may differ on minute points of jurisprudence, because the most learned in the land are required to expound the simplest of our laws, or to obtain its proper application, does it follow that that law is too obscure and complicated to deserve the respectful assent of the enlightened? After all, it is the will of God that spiritual and ecclesiastical affairs should, like all others here below, be administered, not by angels, but by men, the holiest and most inspired of whom have never been fully exempted from human weakness and from human error. To this supreme jurisdiction of our Church, as to many others, I humbly and confidently bow, though I may feel myself all incompetent to define its every degree and attribute, satisfied as I am that none other which has been devised has ever been so efficient for the outward peace and the religious unity of so many millions. I hold the last true recourse, in spiritual differences, to rest at Rome, as you believe that the last appeal to Justice may safely be borne to Westminster Hall. And yet, I think I heard you say the other evening, that one page of Blackstone's

Commentaries was enough to perplex you for a week."

"There might be some sense in all this, to be sure, most philosophical Saint, if you were satisfied not to attach so immutable and incontrovertible a character to the decisions of your highest tribunal. I never saw so clearly until now, what a millstone around your necks is this alleged infallibility of your Church. But even if we clearly knew where it resides, we should yet have to consider as especially inspired those whose crimes and follies have too often been clearly repugnant to every principle of religion. Don't be offended, my dear; I have named no one."

"I am not the least offended, dear Lady Templedale," replied Cécile, pensively. "And, I will fairly own, that if I have ever felt strangely perplexed and bewildered, it is by the very argument which you have last invoked. Yes, it is a mournful reflection, that the annals of the Church should be sullied by crimes so dark, and by the formal promulgation of such detestable doctrines. Often has my faith thereby been terrified; and yet, I trust that it is all unimpaired."

"Ah! let us hear how that may be?"

"Well, but you can have no idea," resumed Cécile, laughing, "how fearful is the ordeal to which you are subjecting me. You really should allow me, in my turn, to address a very few questions to you?"

"There is now some reason in that request, to be sure. What have you to ask?"

"In the first place, then, do you hold that we can hope to be saved by the law or sect which we profess, so that we be diligent to frame our lives accordingly?"

"Let me see, my dear; I suppose that I do."

"Indeed!" cried Cécile, smiling; and yet you belong to the Established Church."

"I trust so."

"Then, you do not remember that, in one of her Articles, she declares those to be accursed, I think that I am using her very words, who say what has just fallen from you."

"Nay, but you took me unawares, you execrable little daughter of Loyola! I thought, of course, that you were speaking of Christian sects."

"It matters not very much for my present purpose. It is sufficient that we should both agree in regarding, as an indispensable condition, the clear perception of certain doctrinal truths. Now, for my second question;

do you consider the unworthiness of the minister to impair the authority of the doctrine, or to hinder the effect of the Sacrament?"

"Ah! I am ready for you now," answered Lady Templedale. "We have an Article, if I remember right, which very distinctly answers your question in the negative, upon the ground that the evil will ever mingle with the good, and even sometimes predominate in the Visible Church."

"Very well; I have only two questions more. You regard, I presume, the Mosaic dispensation as proceeding no less directly from God than our own?"

"Of course."

"And yet you see some essential differences between the two, at all events, in their practical results?"

"Well, such differences, I should deem, cannot wholly be denied, notwithstanding so many able efforts to reconcile them."

"That's a good child," resumed Cécile, laughing; "I will release you now, and attempt to draw some definite conclusions, for my purpose, from your replies. We believe then, in common, that there are certain Sacred Truths, which even the purest and holiest in life are bound to receive; that the evidences and authority of these Truths can in no wise suffer from the unworthiness of their appointed ministers; and that these Truths themselves, though equally revealed from above, and concordant in all their essential points, have yet varied at different periods, in their effects and bearing upon the conduct of men. Such points being granted, is our Catholic credulity so blind, so unimaginable, when we profess, first: that a distinct, permanent, and ever-accessible authority exists upon earth for the true definition and establishment of those doctrines which we are bound to embrace under the most fearful penalties;—secondly, that the utter unworthiness of the earthly minister does not impair the efficacy of the ministration;—and thirdly, that the appointed instruments of Divine justice, or Divine wrath, while occasionally wielding the sword with a severity at which we shudder, may have been, even then, the obedient agents of the Almighty's inscrutable designs, as often, perhaps, as the tools of their own unhallowed passions."

"Conny," interrupted Lady Templedale, "are you closely following that up? Do you see that the drift of this last consideration is, fully to justify and to bear out Queen Mary,

or the Duke of Alba, by the example of Joshua, or of Judas Maccabeus?"

"No, in truth, dear Lady Templedale," replied Cécile, anxiously. "All that I wish to urge is, that the Jewish, no less than the Catholic faith, having been that of innumerable generations, through periods of great darkness, trial, and temptation, both must stand arraigned, before the judgment seat of history, for the follies, the crimes, and the perversity of unnumbered ages. Are we to believe that so many bloody deeds were ordained and sanctioned by the God of Mercy? For my part, I cannot, in every case. Are we, on the other hand, to aver that the avenging sword of the Almighty was never confided to mortal man? We may not, even if we would. Shall we finally regard the Divine origin of the creed as disproved by its darker annals? My answer shall be yours."

"You most intolerable casuist; who taught you such special pleading as this?"

"Well," replied Cécile, smiling, "what I may have learned about the rudiments of logic was, at all events, imparted to me by no Jesuit, as his sister here can affirm. To be sure, I might have stated, in the outset, that I believe in the Divine authority of the Apostolical Church precisely as you do in that of the Holy Scriptures; but," continued she, more gravely, "I see no other of our tenets regarding which the conviction of reason is more easily reconciled with the persuasion of faith. Do you remember, dear Conny, when Edward so kindly instructed us in the leading elements of the British constitution, how astonished and indignant we both were at its fundamental principle, that the Sovereign of England can do no wrong?"

"Yes, darling, I recollect it very well."

"And yet, how soon were we converted! How soon were we convinced, when Edward called upon us to observe the opposite principles and their consequences, that this national fiction, superstition, or whatever you may entitle it, is, after all, the essential condition of the repose, the welfare, and the liberties of the community. Let us, for a moment, apply the same test to our previous subject. Let us despoil the Church of all authority and jurisdiction in purely spiritual matters, and what shall be our refuge? Is each man to shape his course according to the natural dictates of his reason and of his conscience? Such a tenet is rejected by you no less strenuously than by us. Shall we pronounce the written Word as all-sufficient

in itself to direct and to guide us into the right path? Observe, dear Lady Templedale, that beyond the ranks of the true believers in Christianity, this doctrine is no easier to prove and to enforce than our own. Remember, also, that within the great Christian community, where the subject has been so fully discussed during so many ages, they who deny that such is the purpose, and such the intent of the recorded testimonies, are far more numerous, and fully as obdurate, as those who will not admit the peculiarly apostolic character of our faith. I pass over these considerations, however; I admit that the Bible, and the Bible alone, shall be my guide. But is it to be my guide only? No, all will claim the same privilege, and heresy will be enthroned in each erring conscience."

"Stop a moment," interrupted Lady Templedale; "you must remember that, after all, it is in Roman Catholic countries that the principal reformers, or, if you will, the principal heretics, have appeared."

"Yes, but we gave no spiritual sanction to their doctrines or to their differences. You do. I am well aware that if I say in England that the teaching of the Holy Scriptures is occasionally obscure, ambiguous, and contradictory, I am uttering a sentiment which may appear almost impious; and yet, can we shut our eyes to the historical evidence that sects innumerable have sprung up since the Reformation, equally conscientious, equally convinced that the Letter was with them, but in whose implacable contests the glorious mirror of truth has been broken and shivered into a thousand conflicting fragments? You soon felt, you soon acknowledged this extreme but inevitable evil. After having invoked, to rend the Church, the free interpretation of the Text, you were constrained yourselves practically to claim the very authority which you had spiritually repudiated. You were not prepared to see the sacred Majesty of England dragged to the scaffold because Joshua slew several kings; nor your venerable prelates or statesmen smitten under I know not which rib, because the Redeemer had said that, 'He brought not peace, but the sword.' You stated just now, Lady Templedale, that the alleged infallibility of our Church was a fearful millstone round her neck. Is, then, the avowed fallibility of yours a burden so lightly borne? My appeal shall be to herself. No, often do I rejoice to think that I may believe, not merely as a fiction of policy, but as an article of faith,

that the true Church of Christ has a Spiritual, Catholic, and Heaven-directed Head."

"Well, my dear, you are welcome to the conviction, no doubt; but let me tell you, by the way, that you would find it easier to propagate the doctrine among other sincere Christians, if there were some allusions to it in the creeds of the earlier apostles and fathers."

"I do not conceive in what terms they could have corroborated it stronger and clearer than those of our Saviour's own especial and repeated delegations to Saint Peter. But suppose," continued Cécile smiling, "that I were to reverse the question; suppose I were to inquire where they proclaim their belief in the all-sufficient character of Holy Writ, in the existence of separate National Churches, in the Spiritual authority of Temporal Princes, and in sundry other matters, what would be your reply? I am aware that when Conny declares that she believes in one Catholic and Apostolic Church, she only implies her credence in the fact that there exists throughout the world a great and sorely divided Christian community. We cannot be quite so liberal in the interpretation of our articles of faith. We esteem this to be a distinct doctrine as well as the others, pledging our belief in the original and unaltered institution of our Universal Church."

"Unaltered, my dear, that is what we cannot admit. We hold that subtle and Jesuitical little spirits like your own went on corrupting and perverting the true doctrines with their traditions and interpretations, until the glorious Reformation was called forth."

"To introduce, Lady Templedale, the interpretations and traditions of other men! At all events, you cannot deny, I should think, that during a certain number of ages, Christian Truth must entirely have disappeared from the face of the globe, or have been faithfully held by us."

"No, my dear, unfaithfully."

"That is the charge, dear Lady Templedale; but recollect how you have failed to prove it, as yet, before the great majority of believers, whose authority, if union were our object, might one day or another be considered as final. What say you—shall we put the question to the vote in Christendom, and see if she be prepared thus to disown herself?"

"No, no, my dear, we shall not allow our-

selves to be converted by the judgment of our adversaries."

"Then," rejoined Cécile smiling, "as I have nothing more conclusive to offer, may I at length be allowed to retire. See, it is very nearly one o'clock."

"You shocking hypocrite," resumed Lady Templedale, "don't we all know that you never go to bed before two or three, and you are just as well here, as if you were poring over some infidel volume in your own room. You have done such valiant battle for the superstitions, that you shall now enter the lists for the mummeries. Can you conceive what your friend Conny was saying just now? It appears that, once upon a time, she saw a Roman Catholic service at Glanford, and so greasy did the Priest look, so often were little tinkling bells rung, that the most she could do was not to laugh outright until it was all over."

"Indeed, Lady Templedale?" replied the unmoved Cécile. "She never ventured to tell me all that. To be sure, I did not require to learn that few things appear more ridiculous than a reverence in which we do not share."

"Is that all you have to offer in defence of the complexion of your Priests, and the ceremonies of your Church?"

"Well, Lady Templedale, on the former head, the less I say perhaps the better, as I am too short-sighted to be a very accurate, even if I were a very attentive observer. As to our services, I will readily admit that, in a small country chapel, they will show somewhat like the performance of Richard III. and his battles, which we witnessed together last year in the barn at the Glanford Fair. Certainly, we were not very much impressed by the scenic effects; but yet, in my mind, Shakspeare required no apology, saving perhaps that he had written for another stage."

"So I suppose, my dear, that we are not to judge of a Catholic service unless we can see it at St. Peter's?"

"Not exactly; but our ceremonial is unquestionably best adapted to our great and ever open Cathedrals and Churches, crowded by the faithful of every degree, where the gigantic aisles and vaults could not be pervaded by any human voice, and where the heart of the remotest and humblest present is yet taught to thrill with each successive act and symbol of the general worship."

"Well, but, my dear, could not all this

be rationalized a little for the selecter assemblages?"

"Perhaps so, Lady Templedale; but the task would be a fearful one indeed! I will not inquire whether, when we should have so rationalized our services, to use your own expression, as to suit the taste of a congregation of Newtons, we would have rendered the form of our Catholic worship much more congenial to the Divine Mind; at all events, should we not have removed it very much further from the apprehension of the Poor in Spirit, who, on this account alone, are declared to be Blessed? Remember, besides, what duties and what difficulties are entailed upon the Head of the Catholic Church. If once the authority and prestige of ancient, unaltered, and uniform observance are cast aside; if the conflicting prejudices, or even requirements of communities so diverse, are to be consulted, where is the concession to end, and what will then become of the symbolized Unity to which we so reverently adhere?"

"We manage pretty well without all that, my dear."

"No, my dear Lady Templedale, to speak frankly, I do not think you do. Your Church, having relinquished her Catholic for her National character, was, no doubt, free to shape her Observances, as well as her Doctrines, according to the local dictates of human wisdom. What have been the results, in these realms alone? They have been rejected by Scotland; they have been imposed by constraint alone upon Ireland; in England herself, they have not satisfied your numerous dissenting sects. And yet, what sacrifices have you not made to meet the popular clamour? Do you remember, Conny, when we went together to the afternoon service at Westminster Abbey? Even you, who are far too wise to waste much regret upon artistic and imaginary grievances, were a little staggered. In the centre of the majestic and time-honoured aisle, a little modern edifice, erected for the convenience of a score of casual worshippers, and even these only detained throughout the service by an innocent stratagem. Surely this cannot have been the mission—this the appointed audience! You should have levelled the noble pile, dear Lady Templedale, when you despoiled it of both, for it stands in fearful judgment against you."

"We are not the least alarmed, are we, Conny?" resumed Lady Templedale. "We

are quite satisfied with the rational services that we can find elsewhere, if not there."

"Rational again!" replied Cécile, smiling. "You will have more numerous congregations when man will be framed of intellect alone. Our appeal is not to human reason, but to human nature, and hence the universal response."

"You can hear that of England, my dear, at all events, for it is audible enough. She may be persuaded, but she will not be beguiled, and rather than see her churches converted into theatres, she will close them herself."

"It is a needless precaution, Lady Templedale. You will have no Protestant Raffaele to sully their walls; no reformed Bossuet to over-exalt the imagination of the weak-minded."

"Very possibly, my dear; but we shall have none the less a Church strong in the confidence and in the affections of a loyal and determined people."

"She is strong, we know it," replied Cécile, thoughtfully; "strong in the holy and venerable character of her ministers; stronger still in the support of the passions and prejudices which called her into existence. And yet, Lady Templedale, there is a firmer and a surer foundation, even humanly speaking, than the power and the pride of a nation."

"What may that be, my dear?"

"The universal aspiration of Christendom for its appointed unity. Which is the rock, Lady Templedale, and which is the sand? The days are gone by, when each isolated community could live for itself alone, in a fool's paradise of imaginary perfection. Europe is no longer a distant and unknown land. While every day, while every hour, increases our connection and communion with her, upon every other point, are we to remain eternally divided, estranged, and hostile there where it is most natural and most essential that we should be agreed?"

"You should have thought of that at Rome, my dear, before the extremity of your folly and of your arrogance rendered this estrangement inevitable."

"Ah!" replied Cécile, sadly, "you cannot feel more deeply upon that point than I do; but how far more bitterly still would I grieve, did I think that we were wholly responsible for the fatal separation. You have been often, and lived long, Lady Templedale, in Catholic countries. Did it never strike you how, by

wise concession and compromise, the temporal authority has there obtained all, or nearly all, the privileges, the immunities, and the rights, which it had legitimately contended for, when emancipated by the more enlightened ages?"

"To a certain extent, perhaps, my dear; but, to tell you the truth, I never inquired very closely, as we cannot bring our mind to consider the great Reformation as an evil."

"It has been no evil to our Church, I firmly believe," rejoined Cécile; "but a salutary though severe ordeal. Elsewhere, its ultimate results have yet to be shown. We can witness them daily now, in the fury with which you are constrained to assail the Catholic World, that the schism may not seem unjustified. No passion, no prejudice, no resentment can be allowed to slumber for an instant, and the very principles of the faith which we hold in common must be ceaselessly reviled and trampled under foot, lest the simple-minded should inquire why all Christians are not brothers? Is this no evil, and is its end near at hand?"

As Cécile thus spoke the clock struck two. She hastily arose now, and, extending her hand to Lady Templedale, said:

"We have tried a dangerous experiment with wondrous success, but we must not repeat it. At all events, I have received no wound, and I trust that I have inflicted none."

"None, whatsoever, my dear child," replied Lady Templedale, embracing her, "but as I have a little more experience of the world than you have, perhaps you will allow me to whisper a secret in your ear."

"Certainly," answered Cécile smiling.

"Well, remember my words: the torch of Latimer will never be extinguished in England."

"I fear it much," replied Cécile, "and rejoice to think that I am not framed to be an apostle any more than a martyr."

"You might be both, you little witch, with your inspired eyes and voice. But we really must disperse now, for that old gentleman over the chimney-piece is frowning more grimly than ever upon us."

"And well he may," cried Constance, laughing, "for he was the first Basinstoke who renounced the Roman Catholic errors."

"And not without very good reasons," observed Cécile, "as Sir Charles's rent-roll could tell to this day."

"I hope that I misunderstand you, you

most malicious saint," said Lady Templedale; "but you think, I suppose, that your ancestors should have stood by the St. Edmunds' at the Boyne and at Sheriffmuir."

Though the heir of that respectable and ancient line had been, since the origin of the conversation, ostensibly engrossed in studying a huge volume of engravings, it is not to be supposed that his thoughts and his eyes had never wandered in another direction.

"They were a faithful race, at all events," exclaimed he now, "though they seem to have had a remarkable partiality for the losing side. Our first convert, I believe, was an orphan child, Miss Cécile."

"So I have heard," replied the Saint.

"Well," observed the wise Constance as the small party were ascending the staircase together, "I must make one concluding observation; to what have you been appealing since you were first attacked, dearest Cécile, saving to our reason, whose testimony you so disdainfully reject?"

"I do not entirely reject her testimony, darling Conny," answered Cécile: "I look upon her as the slave who is to bear the torch before the footsteps of Faith, but not to direct her course."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE VOTIVE OFFERING.

CÉCILE's atmospheric prognostications turned out to be more accurate than will doubtless prove her religious previsions, for the day which followed the great wrangle was, as she had foreboded, a rainy one. The contemplated expedition to the Thornhills was therefore abandoned, and each party was constrained to shape out for itself some indoor occupation. In similar cases, the ladies, particularly when they are so intellectually gifted as those then assembled at Redburn Hall, have a great and unquestionable advantage over their sterner associates. We may presume then that the two fair cousins, Lady Templedale and Lady Helen, each passed a very pleasant afternoon in their respective apartments, while we reserve our main solicitude for our hero.

What was he to do? He had spent the better part of the morning playing at billiards with Sir Charles, until the green cloth of the table appeared more dreary to him than the rain-clouded expanse without; he had spelt over every syllable of the paper; he had taken down three distinct volumes from the library shelves, none of which had

fixed his wandering attention, and, at length, in actual despair, he too had sought the solitude of his room. We will not undertake to say that, when there, he was driven to such an utter extremity as the French servant, who, in the perplexity of an unexpected holiday, propounded to himself the application of leeches as the most appropriate recreation. Certain it is, nevertheless, that the young Viscount must have been in a very unusual frame of mind, for he sat down at his writing-table, and remained there, intently absorbed, for nearly three hours. Gracious Heavens! what would not Comte de Jarnac, or Baron de Brunnow, the first diplomat in Europe, or Lord Foley, the respected chairman himself, have given, could they have detected their young colleague of Coventry House Club engaged as he then was! For, strange as it may seem, when asked, as the dressing-bell rang, whether he had any letters for the post, he answered, after all this writing, that he had none! And yet, when he arose at length, his purpose seemed accomplished, for he destroyed several rough leaves, complacently read over their contents, as re-copied upon half a sheet of letter-paper—and then, having folded the latter, he enclosed it, together with a bright new shilling, in a beautiful little oriental purse which he chanced to have in his possession. This important but most secret concern being thus disposed of, St. Edmunds applied himself to the duties of his toilette with so much good will, that, contrary to his accustomed and more dilatory habits, he was enabled to reach the library just as the dinner-bell was ringing.

The first person that joined him there was Cécile, who, well knowing her uncle's punctuality, invariably made the earliest appearance on such occasions. This our hero might have known, as it was notorious at Redburn; and yet, perhaps, he was not aware of the circumstance, for, when the Saint entered, he seemed, if not surprised, at all events more staggered than would beseem one for whom fortitude was an especial duty. Cécile, too, appeared somewhat startled, and, when their attempted conversation began, her laconic answers were by no means delivered in the firm and somewhat authoritative tone which she had assumed on the previous night. Still, our hero did not fail to release the above-mentioned purse from the durance of his waistcoat pocket, but, while he still held it somewhat dubiously in

his hand, Lady Templedale entered, closely followed by Sir Charles, and the purse was restored to its previous confinement.

During the evening, it might have been remarked, as perhaps it was remarked by the all-observing Lady Templedale, that the young Viscount was unusually thoughtful, and Saint Cecilia more than usually silent. To be sure, this might be accounted for by the gloomy influence of the weather, which probably weighed more or less upon the spirits of all present, as, before eleven o'clock had struck, Conny, Lady Helen, and Sir Charles himself had noiselessly retired. Then came Lady Templedale's turn, and no sooner did she testify a similar purpose than Cécile folded up her work and prepared to follow.

The agitation of the Life-Guardsman now became convulsive. He rose, he sat down, he rose again, he twisted his moustache to an unprecedented degree, and finally, just as the two ladies reached the door, he said:

"Oh! Miss Cécile, I beg your pardon, but you promised to show me where the collection of the 'Quarterly Review' is to be found."

"On the second or third shelf, I believe, of case E, or F, in the print-room," replied she, dubiously.

"Better say that you are not quite sure at once, my dear," exclaimed Lady Templedale, "and go and help him to find it—you who know the binding as well as the contents of every book here. I can move quietly on and you will soon catch me up."

Thus directed, Cécile adjourned with St. Edmunds to the print-room, and was not long in pointing out to him the familiar collection. She was then about to withdraw, when he whispered:

"Dear Miss Cécile, I must not forget my lost wager."

"What wager?" muttered she.

"Don't you remember? the shilling which I was to pay if—the glass was wrong and the almanac right—"

"Oh! I had forgotten—indeed, I thought it was only a joke."

"No, no; it was a fair bet—pray accept the shilling—you will find it there, in this little purse."

"But I cannot take the purse too—it is much too beautiful—"

"It is not beautiful at all, but it comes from Smyrna; pray don't refuse it."

"Indeed—I do not know what to say—and there appears to be something besides the shilling in the purse."

"Oh! it's nothing, Miss Cécile—or something that you are to read when you are quite alone—"

The Saint was now as pale as death; but our hero, who had well observed her emotion, put an end to all further hesitation by forcibly closing the little trembling hand which held the purse, and then pressing it to his lips.

"Holy Virgin! Lord St. Edmunds—what can you mean!" murmured she, in a faltering voice, and she glided out of the apartment.

This is a world, to be sure, of strange contradictions and disparities! Here we have, on the one side, Saint Cecilia, who could barely distinguish between a sixpence and a sovereign, and whose little savings were all invariably distributed among the poor—and, on the other side, Lord St. Edmunds, who was accustomed to hand over or to receive five hundred pound notes at Ascot or at Doncaster, as complacently as any man on the course; here, say we, were these two distinguished young personages, faltering, and trembling, and fluttered, beyond all possible description, at the mere exchange of a single shilling! It certainly is a singular world, whatever geologists may urge to the contrary! And then, when his great exploit had been achieved, when the fragile little hand had been constrained to clasp the proffered token, how refulgent was our hero's exultation! Napoleon's brow on the battle field of Austerlitz could not for an instant have been compared with that of the triumphant Life-Guardsman.

In the meanwhile, Saint Cecilia was tripping up the antiquated staircase as swiftly as if ten reformed bishops had been in close pursuit of her. Indeed, so rapid was her ascent, that Lady Templedale, who was waiting for her on the upper landing-place, could not but exclaim:

"There is no hurry, my dear; take care, or you will break a blood-vessel."

Cécile was too breathless to reply, saving by a faint laugh, so that her sage companion, rightly judging that a little repose was her first requirement, escorted her at once to the door of her room, and, with a smiling admonition, not to dream too much of the "Quarterly Review," wished her a good-night.

The Saint paused within the threshold of her apartment, until the retiring footsteps of Lady Templedale could no longer be discerned. She then closed the door, bolted it, locked it, and, dropping down upon her couch, proceed-

ed, oh! with what a trembling hand, to examine the Oriental purse, and its contents. The shilling was very much like any other shilling, except that it was peculiarly clean and bright; but the half sheet of letter-paper, when it was unfolded, what was it found to contain?

Immortal Thalia! so oft invoked by the despairing author, we too will humbly call upon thee now—not that thou mayest turn thy heavenly complexion here, but rather that thou shouldst conceal it in a fold of thy flowing mantle! The verses which Cécile read, if verses they may be called, were to the following effect:

"My wager's lost! Who now will dare contend
With thee upon the secrets of the skies,
Or what the lowering heavens may portend?
They have no mysteries for thy bright eyes—
Thou see'st the causes of this mortal state,
Whence all creation's wondrous works have grown;
Thou canst foretell the unconscious millions' fate,
To thee the Almighty's dread decrees are shown.
Ages have toil'd in vain to learn what thou hast
known!

"O rest not there, thou who canst thus reveal
All that my soul so long did thirst to know,
But preach once more; thou mayst not aught
conceal,
Since ignorance is perdition here below!
To hear thy voice, angels will hush their strain
Of deathless praise before the eternal throne;
If thou wilt teach, I ne'er will doubt again;
The sceptic heart shall bow to thee alone,
Thy faith, thy hope, thy creed shall ever be mine
own!"

Such was the effusion; now what did Cécile think of it? What she should have thought, or rather what she should have done, we will fearlessly state, viz., have remitted it, by return of post, to its author, after having shown it to Lady Helen; but this, we lament to say, the frail Saint neither did nor thought of doing. Twice she read both stanzas through; once, with such a radiant smile of unearthly rapture as seldom brightens a mortal countenance; and once again, with a graver mien, as, pearl after pearl, the happy tears fell by the words, which they were far too discreet to obliterate. Then she convulsively pressed the senseless paper to her lips; and then, murmuring the half-uttered words, "Saved!" "Redeemed," she cast herself upon her knees at her usual place of worship.

What she there so frantically exclaimed and whispered turn in turn, we will not pretend to report. Cécile's prayers were generally in Latin; and though we have suffered

much formerly, in various manners, for the right acquisition of that venerated language, we have reason to fear, from recent experience, that we are no longer by any means so proficient as we were wont to be deemed by our over-indulgent instructors. We had humbly conceived, for instance, that the word, "persequor," as its French derivative, "poursuivre," should be translated in the honest vernacular by the kindred expressions, "pursue," or "follow up." Having been informed, however, upon very popular authority, that the original term could involve no other construction than that of the direst persecution by fire and sword, we have thought it advisable to remove at once from our brow the few and fast-fading laurels of our academic contests, and to think of them as if they had never been. We, therefore, as we have already stated, will not attempt even to surmise what may have been the purport of Cécile's invocation. Nor, indeed should we feel quite justified in mentioning at whose shrine it was poured forth—for the idolatrous Saint Cecilia's orisons were very frequently addressed to—in short, the less we say about them, the better.

When these prayers, if so they may be termed, were at length concluded, Cécile sat down by her toilette table, read the verses once more, once more pressed the last line to her lips, and then, her eyes having strayed in the direction of her looking-glass, she could not but smile at the strange appearance which she presented. Her hair—we have already stated, we believe, that the Redburn Saint's hair was altogether unrivalled throughout the Eastern Counties for length, lustre, and luxuriance; this peerless hair had, in the agitation of the previous hour, fallen from its well-regulated folds into dark clusters, which now enshrouded her whole person, like the veil of the Tragic Muse whom we shall have presently to summon. Cécile, we aver, could not but smile somewhat complacently at the magic beauty of this, Nature's choicest gift, as it then showed in its enchanting disarray; and yet the smile endured but for a fleeting second. One moment more, and she was on her knees again before the image of the Virgin Mother; one moment again, and her long, sharp, ruthless toilette scissors were in her hand. Now, Melpomene, we may invoke thee in truth.

We have had much to mourn for in these later years. We have seen our brightest and purest hopes, and not ours only, but the hopes,

the pride, the glory of a nation in the dust. We have beheld the greatest, the most loved, the most exalted in rank, in intellect, in more than saintly virtue, cast, without so much as a shelter, upon the strange wide world. Then we have thought of the days, when the over-burdened heart could find its own relief in an agony of tears, and when the buoyant spirit would emerge from each paroxysm of its childish grief as lightsome and as free as if care and sorrow were but the dream of the sterner moralist;—we have thought of those days, but all in vain. And yet, though we could no longer weep, where we have most grieved, we question whether we should have witnessed, without a tear, each silken tress of Saint Cecilia's hair falling under the merciless steel. Why, gracious Heavens! the shortest among them was longer than our own over-lengthy arm, and yet none, no, not one, found grace in her sight, saving one little curl on either side of her forehead, each so short, so meagre, and so spare, that the sight of it would have staggered a lady of the most modest pretensions on her recovery from her fifteenth confinement. When the smiling Saint had so completely achieved this execution, that the back of her head, so peerlessly adorned a few seconds before, could be compared to nothing in nature, except, perhaps, the general clothes-brush at the Star and Garter Hotel, she raised each fallen victim, united them again in ghastly mockery of their pristine array, and then hung them at the foot of the large ebony and ivory crucifix before which she was wont to pour forth her prayers. These were again repeated with unusual fervour, after which she retired to her rest, not without very thoughtfully securing our hero's poetry from the indiscreet eye of the housemaid, by depositing it under her own pillow.

What were Cécile's feelings, when her throbbing brow was laid there again at the close of this eventful day? Shall we attempt to divine or to describe them? Perchance, to be sure, may we have known some that were not wholly dissimilar in the merry days when beauty's passing smile would cast us, for a fortnight at least, into a state of moody abstraction, from which none were to attempt to recall us at the peril of their lives; and when her frown, nay, even her absent glance, left us no other care, saving to devise which was the most dramatic form of self-destruction. Rather, nevertheless, will we resign the task of shadowing forth what may then

have been the fair Saint's state of mind to one, in every way, far more competent for the office. Indeed, we would gladly borrow more largely still from her burning page, were it not so deeply inscribed in the memory of England, that detection would ever be our unfailing penalty.

"She regained her couch, but never thought of sleep. Till morning dawned, she was tossed on a buoyant but unquiet sea, where billows of trouble rolled under surges of joy. She thought sometimes she saw, beyond its wild waters, a shore, sweet as the hills of Beulah; and now and then, a freshening gale, wakened by hope, bore her spirit triumphantly towards the bourne. But she could not reach it, even in fancy; a counteracting breeze blew off land, and continually drove her back. Sense would resist delirium, judgment would warn passion."

When the struggling day-light aroused the Saint from her fitful and agitated rest, the first more clearly defined impression which broke upon her mind was one of unutterable joy, still mingled with the intensest apprehension. A great crisis in her life was clearly at hand, for which the tranquil past could afford no guidance, or the storm-clad future disclose no hopeful beacon; and yet, how her heart thrilled and bounded with the newborn spirit of the hour. Then, another strange remembrance flitted across her mind. She hastily arose, ran to her looking-glass, and laughed aloud as she recognised her altered appearance. A few minutes more were absorbed in anxious prayer, then in assiduous study of the treasured lines, after which, as will often occur, alas! even in moments of the greatest exaltation, the prominent care for the day resumed its unwelcome rule. Much, nearly all that had occurred, might remain safely enshrined deep within her secret heart, but one rash impetuous act could find no refuge there. Ere long it must be revealed; ere long, more than one hostile, sarcastic, or inquiring glance would fall upon the all evident traces of that wild deed, and the too impulsive Saint trembled and quailed already, as if every eye at Redburn were fixed, in mocking wonder, upon her truly devoted head.

What was to be done? Happily she possessed one little cap which she had worn once, during a very severe cold, and which might do duty again for the present. But, scarcely had her toilette, with this unusual appurtenance, been concluded, than, revers-

ing their usual practice, the fair Conny came tripping in.

"Well, dearest Cécile," exclaimed she, "what has happened? I have been expecting you for more than ten minutes. You are quite well, I trust."

"Indeed, Conny, I am shamefully late," muttered Cécile, "but the fact is that I have a very bad cold."

"A cold, in this darling little clever head?" answered Constance, fondly embracing her cousin. But her hand having rested for an instant upon the empty cap, she started back, in horror full as great as if it had encountered the slimy scaly back of a boa constrictor. "Your hair!" shrieked she, "your glorious beautiful hair! My dear Cécile, what have you done to it?"

"Well, I have thinned it a little, to be sure," said the Saint, with a more composed smile.

"Thinned it! Why it is all gone, all cut off," replied Conny, gazing with undisguised anxiety fully into her cousin's countenance. "You must be mad, stark, staring, raving mad!"

"You know, dear Conny, that I have always been reckoned more or less affected in that way."

"That may be, but not to this utmost extremity; you surely must have had some sort of reason for such unheard-of folly."

"Well, dear Conny, if reason and folly are for once to be yoked together, no doubt several motives might be assigned. Perhaps my long hair was the cause of the many headaches which I have had lately; or perhaps it prevented my sleeping at night; or it might have been falling to an alarming extent; or it may have offended me, and betrayed me into various errors."

"Nonsense, nonsense," interrupted her cousin, "don't attempt to deceive Conny; you know it is of no earthly use." But, as she thus spoke, the eyes of the sapient little personage fell, for the first time, upon the votive tresses suspended, as they now were, at the foot of the crucifix. She was silent for a moment, then she waxed amazingly thoughtful, and then again kissing her cousin, she said:—

"What is done, Cécile, cannot be prevented now, that's certain, so that we have no choice but to make the best of it. Shall go down first to prepare them all a little, that they may not be quite overpowered, nor you either, with their amazement?"

"Indeed, it would be just like your kind and wise self."

"You have mentioned," continued Conny, "many possible reasons, among which I suppose that I may suggest the most plausible, as having occurred to me. Which shall it be; the headaches?"

"As you please, dear."

"Very well. Then I will mention the headaches, and, at all events, I suppose that you need not contradict me?"

"Well, I presume not."

"When Constance entered the breakfast-room, where the rest of the family was already assembled, she did not fail to premise that she had some very important news to communicate, and to conclude by stating that Cécile had been so foolish as to cut off most of her hair, in the paroxysm of one of her headaches.

"Cut off her hair!" cried the amazed Baronet. "God bless my soul! what a pity! Why it was the prettiest thing about her."

"You might even say," added Lady Helen, "the only thing which could give her the least pretension to good-looks."

Conny, her father, and Lady Templedale, did not fail to enter their immediate protest against this sentiment, but they were not joined by Lord St. Edmunds, who remained still gazing upon the first fair speaker with an expression of absolute bewilderment.

"No, no," resumed Lady Templedale; "her hair was very beautiful, certainly; but, to impair her greatest attraction, she must put out her speaking eyes, which I dare say she will do some day or other; and even then, there will still be a charm about her, and throughout her, that is not often equalled."

Scarcely had this opinion been uttered, when the door was gently opened, and the Saint, with a sorely abashed mien, glided to her place. There was one at hand—who it was we have never positively ascertained—whose heart bounded strangely with the relief afforded by her appearance, and all present could not but observe that it was far less altered than it might have been expected.

"Headaches—nonsense!" exclaimed the good-natured Lady Templedale. "We all know that it is Conny who has the headaches, and not she. I'll tell you what it is; the Saint is beginning to discover that Catholic charms are rather at a discount at this moment, and she has hit upon this little de-

vice for enhancing hers with that remarkably pretty cap."

"But is the back hair really cut off?" said Lady Helen; and she was actually proceeding to ascertain the fact, when a very general remonstrance prevailed upon her to desist.

"No, no, dear mamma," cried Constance, very decidedly; "Cécile is under my protection; nobody is to touch her, nor to torment her. Go on with your breakfast, dear child," continued she, "and never mind what any one of them thinks."

"Well said, Miss Conny!" added the Baronet; "stand by her like a brave girl as you are; only mind that she doesn't bite, for I verily believe, now more than ever, that she is madder than any March hare."

CHAPTER XVII.

SAINT CECILIA ONCE MORE REPRIMANDED.

THE very important event which we have thus related excited no inconsiderable wonder throughout the household at Redburn; but the sensation that it produced would have proved doubtless more durable, had not other occurrences closely followed, of even greater historical moment.

The first of these was the departure of Lady Templedale, which, though long delayed in consequence of the most earnest solicitation, finally took place, to the sincere regret of all the forsaken party. It might have been observed that, on the very afternoon so sadly marked by this unwelcome incident, a long letter for Lord Tewkesbury was left in the post-box by the migrating visitor. To what the missive may have related we cannot pretend to insinuate; but it certainly has not appeared to us entirely unworthy of attention that, by its due return, the same post should have brought Lady Helen a letter from her brother, announcing his speedy arrival at Redburn.

The Earl of Tewkesbury's visits, which were not very frequent, always caused a great sensation at the old Hall. Sir Charles, who respected every peer in England of every degree, entertained an especial reverence for his brother-in-law; and the same feeling was shared, more affectionately, though less deferentially, by Lady Helen and her daughter. In this case, however, so sudden, so unforeseen was the announcement, that, on this account no doubt it produced a species of perturbation, from the influence of which neither the new-comer's own son and heir,

nor the retiring Cécile herself, seemed wholly exempt.

It was late in the evening when the illustrious Peer was deposited, by a modest railway station conveyance, at the hall door, and bitterly did the aristocratic Mr. Collins groan, as we do also when we contrast these ignoble equipages with the soul-exalting chariot and four of palmier days. Whether from the effects of the journey, or from some other cause, it occurred to more than one present, and especially to Saint Cecilia, that the ever-courteous manners of Lord Tewkesbury were, upon the whole, less cordial and open than on former occasions. But, as we have said, he arrived at so late an hour, that any very lengthened conversation was scarcely practicable. It was not so on the following morning, for no sooner had breakfast been disposed of, than, at the request of her brother, Lady Helen retired with him alone to the library.

"My dear Helen," said the latter, when he had closed the door upon them, "you are of course too kind and civil to admit that you are a little surprised at my unforeseen appearance, but I must tell you frankly that I have another motive besides the sincere pleasure of meeting you and yours. St. Edmunds has been with you now for an unusual time; which, should you think, among the many attractions that Redburn offers, has mainly influenced him?"

"I cannot exactly say; but, I trust, upon the whole, that matters are progressing according to our wishes."

"Ah!" resumed the Earl, thoughtfully, "I am very happy to hear you say so. None can know better than you do how the case really stands."

"Have you heard anything," anxiously inquired his sister, "which could give you a contrary impression to mine?"

"Well, I have—something. This niece of yours, Cécile—she struck me, last year, as a quiet unpretending girl enough."

"Quiet she may be, but unpretending, *c'est une autre affaire*. How is she concerned with our subject?"

"Simply, my dear Helen, because it has been surmised in my ear that Master St. Edmunds' eyes have been fixed upon her of late, rather more than upon any one else."

"That would be curious enough, ha! ha! ha!" rejoined Lady Helen, with an ironical laugh. But a second afterwards, some new misgiving having doubtless crossed her

mind, she added: "If you wish to have my opinion of the girl, I will tell you that she is just exactly as designing, as dangerous, and as artful a piece of goods as was ever imported from her native land for the perversion of England."

"You don't mean to say so. Then I don't see that we should be over-confident, my dear, that things are going on here exactly according to our wishes."

"My confidence," replied Lady Helen, "proceeds merely from the notion that St. Edmunds, being not quite blind, could not possibly be such a fool as to put the girl for an instant in comparison with Conny. If you have any doubts, however, the sooner the matter is looked into the better, for it would be no joke, indeed, were he to go astray to this extent."

"Upon my word, it wouldn't," exclaimed the Earl. "If Conny and he could but take a fancy for each other, nothing would be more satisfactory; but failing this, our common expectation, I would rather that the boy never married at all than see him set his heart upon this Popish girl. In short, the thing cannot be thought of for a moment, and so the sooner that is established the better. How shall we set to work?"

"Why, you can speak to St. Edmunds yourself."

"To be sure, my dear; but he is a very cool hand, this nephew of yours, I must tell you, and pretty well accustomed to diplomacy in this line. Ten to one that I should get nothing out of him which would give us much insight into this business."

"Then, perhaps I had better speak to Cécile," observed the not unwilling Lady Helen.

"I don't know what to say. It may be rather a delicate conversation, both for you and for her."

"Oh! as for me, Tewkesbury, perhaps you know already that I never find my duty too delicate or too painful to perform; as to her, you may set your scruples still more completely at rest. French blood is not at all so sensitive on these matters."

It chanced, as her ill-fortune would have it, that she to whom this last good-natured sentiment more immediately applied at that very moment appeared at the door of the library, in quest of another volume of the work that she was reading. On perceiving that the room was not untenanted, at it usually was at that hour, she hastily drew back, but it was too late.

"Nothing could be more opportune or more decisive," whispered Lady Helen to her brother, and then, in a louder voice, she exclaimed: "Cécile, come here, if you please, and shut the door after you."

The luckless Saint was obeying, with no greater alacrity than she generally displayed, in responding to a summons from the same quarter, when her aunt continued:

"Come quite close up to us, pray, and look us steadily in the face, if you do not think that it is too great a favour to confer upon two very determined heretics. That is right; now, attend to my questions, and answer them with as much sincerity and good faith as may be. I must tell you that we are not given to be very truthful," added she, in a most audible whisper, to her brother.

It is our duty to state, in extenuation of the frequency with which Lady Helen would reiterate this insinuation against her niece's veracity, that Cécile had, soon after her first arrival at Redburn, and when yet at the mature age of fourteen, been betrayed once into telling a slight falsehood. Though the offence had been visited, at the time, with three distinct punishments, each fully commensurate with the transgression, and though no similar failing was ever imputed to her since, Lady Helen still thought herself justified, at the end of six whole years, in setting down the unfortunate Saint as an invariable and determined falsifier, a surmise the original justness of which no one, we imagine, can fairly gainsay.

"We are not, unfortunately, given to be very truthful," repeated Lady Helen, "so that I am obliged, when I require precise information, to study the countenance, as well as to weigh the words of the reply. Look into our faces, pray, my dear," continued she, ironically raising the chin of Cécile with her forefinger, "that we may gather at least all that you are not able to withhold. Now, tell me precisely what has occurred between yourself and Lord St. Edmunds."

The colour fled so fast from Saint Cecilia's cheek, as these words were uttered, that many would have been moved, and even alarmed, at so sudden a revulsion; but Lady Helen's nerves are constitutionally firm, and she merely continued:

"The question was well put, Tewkesbury, though I say so who should not, and you see that we have obtained some answer, at all events."

The Earl shook his head, and looked very grave.

"That you have walked with him, and talked with him by the hour, my dear," resumed Lady Helen, "and valsed with him, contrary to my wishes, when my back was turned, and kept the whole house up, till Heaven knows what hours, I am well aware. But what his father and I have particular reasons for ascertaining is, whether any—what shall I say?—any communications have taken place between you and him, such as—such as, in short, young ladies, when they are discreet, do not exchange with young men to whom they are, and must remain, mere acquaintances. Do you understand my question?"

"Yes," faltered the Saint.

"Then why do you not answer it, Cécile? Is it because you are ashamed?"

"I am ashamed," gasped the indignant victim, "ashamed, Lady Helen, for the gentle heart of womanhood, that such a conversation as this should be possible."

"Thank you, my dear; but perhaps you will not oblige me to remind you why it is that I do not think the gentle heart of womanhood, as you so prettily say, a much more infallible guide than the Pope of Rome. I am not to be diverted from my righteous object, let me tell you, by any morbid sensibility. That some communications have taken place between you—you, or rather your countenance, cannot deny. Of what precise nature have they been?—No answer!—Then we must proceed constructively. Has he made you any presents for instance?"

Cécile was about most haughtily to repel this insinuation, when the fatal recollection of the Oriental purse fell, like a sheet of ice, upon her heart, and the unuttered response died upon her lips.

"It surpasses all belief!" exclaimed Lady Helen, clasping her hands. "Most strongly have I warned that girl, that a young English gentlewoman, and one in her particular position more especially, really cannot and must not, with any regard to her self-respect, court and receive presents from young men, but it has been of no avail. No sooner had I interfered to prevent her from being actually overloaded with gifts from my son Edward, than, when arrested on one side, the tide begins to pour in from another."

"Lady Helen," cried Cécile, "you have no authority for such charges as these. This is all that has occurred. Lady Templedale

urged me to wager a shilling with Lord St. Edmunds about the weather, and he, having lost it, enclosed it in a little purse, which I did not know how to refuse."

"If this were really all," hastily resumed Lady Helen, most anxious to lose nothing of her vantage ground, "I do not imagine that our questions would have thrown you into such an extraordinary agitation. Something must surely have been said when the purse was so pressingly offered?"

"Nothing, Lady Helen, beyond the offer."

"And was nothing written?"

No answer was returned.

"My questions, I am afraid, are very indiscreet," resumed the triumphant Lady Helen, "but you must excuse their impertinence. The mere notion that what we have thus discovered should be possible, has induced my brother to come all the way from London, where most important concerns required his presence. Perhaps it may be necessary to inform you, that his views respecting the qualifications of his future daughter-in-law may differ very widely indeed from your own, and that he thinks himself especially bound to watch, lest his son should be beguiled into the most irreparable of errors. I will, therefore, without further comment or compliment, proceed with my investigation. The purse, I understood you to admit, was enclosed in a love letter."

"Lady Helen, I never said nor admitted any such thing."

"Then perhaps it enclosed one? We must be very minute, Tewkesbury, with present company. No? Nor a love note? Neither? But there was something written in connection with the purse. It was not a copy of verses, surely? No attempted denial this time, Tewkesbury. St. Edmunds is not a poet, is he?"

"Not that I am aware of, my dear Helen, nor do I conceive that anything short of witchcraft could make him one."

"Ah! true love performs great wonders," replied his sister; "and you, Cécile, I suppose, answered in the same strain?"

"I returned no answer."

"What! neither in prose nor in verse?"

"I have already replied, Lady Helen."

Her aunt paused for a moment, and then said:

"Cécile, we must see those verses."

The Saint remained silent.

"This matter is fully as painful to me as it is to you," resumed Lady Helen; "but

I cannot allow a clandestine correspondence, so serious in its object, to be carried on under my roof. Will you fetch me the verses, Cécile?"

"No, Lady Helen, I will not."

"Then you must prepare, my dear, to see me summoning your maid, and prosecuting, under her auspices, a minute search in your room. You will scarcely prefer this alternative?"

"I shall, Lady Helen. The responsibility of thus violating the holiest secrets of the heart will rest with you alone."

"Then we shall both be satisfied, my dear, and the matter can be presently disposed of accordingly. In the meanwhile, however, I have a question or two yet to ask. Conny, I suppose, knows something about all this?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"What! not Conny? The dear darling angel, the more than sister, and so forth. She not in the secret? Well, this surpasses all belief! Tewkesbury, I am very sorry now that you should not have been here, last month, to have seen this most affectionate, this most considerate cousin on her knees, like a country-barn Siddons, to Sir Charles and to me, lest we should be so cruel, so unfeeling, as to restrict, in any way, her intimacy with our daughter. I understand the purport of the appeal now. It is safer to be unsuspected, even when we stab in the dark. A sister's friendship is a convenient cloak to such treachery as this, for treachery there has been," continued Lady Helen, her honest indignation fairly getting the better of her usually exemplary self-possession. "Ay, not only deceit to all, but scheming practices and provocations the most unmaidenly. Who, otherwise, could credit, that a young man, gifted with the ordinary blessing of sight, should, for an instant, prefer what we here witness, to one who is universally reckoned amongst the most attractive in England? I only wish that she were here, that we might laugh outright at the contrast!"

As she thus spoke, with a rapid and dextrous wave of the hand, she removed the cap which concealed the jagged and mutilated remains of what was once Saint Cecilia's noble head of hair; and the sight which was thus revealed might well have provoked the beholder's derision, even without any comparison. Lord Tewkesbury, however, singular as it may seem, neither laughed nor smiled. Gazing more intently upon Cécile's counte-

nance, he beheld there the trace of more than one solitary tear, not such as fall fast from the bountiful flow of sorrow, but such as are wrung, drop by drop, from fortitude by the extremest agony. She steadily encountered his glance. It was a strange look which she cast upon him then, one not far akin from that which Othello dreaded to meet at the eternal judgment seat, lest it should hurl his soul from heaven.

"Ah! are you moved at last?" said Cécile, in her own tone of calm defiance. "I was curious to see how long a Peer of England, he himself a father, could stand by and see an orphaned, unprotected, penniless girl reviled and insulted for his entertainment."

Lord Tewkesbury was much perplexed at this simple appeal. Deeply prejudiced as he had been by Lady Helen's spirited delineation of her niece's true character, and astounded as he was by the startling disclosures that had been elicited from the latter, still he was a well-bred kind-hearted man of the world, and he could not but feel that the Saint's earnest reproof was not uncalled for.

"My dear young lady," exclaimed he, not without some embarrassment, "I should be grieved more than I could say, if this necessarily painful conversation were unduly to affect you. Pray remember that it is a duty to yourself, as well as to others, to obviate all future and serious suffering by a timely explanation."

"Oh! it is for my sake, is it," replied Cécile bitterly, "that I have been dragged to this extremity of shame? I did not know that it was a matter of such grave moment at Redburn, whether my heart were to wither or to break."

"But, my dear Miss Cécile," resumed the Earl, "since you have yourself admitted that my son takes a particular, and very natural, interest in your fate—"

"I have made no such admission, Lord Tewkesbury," interrupted Cécile fiercely. "Lady Helen's questions were so devised as to render denial impossible, where admission would be equally insincere. The truth lies between the two, and it shall be fearlessly told by me, now as always. Your son has observed from the first, what you may have seen now yourself with a very different feeling, that I have my trials and my sorrows here. Nay, more, he has deemed, perchance, that there may be an intention somewhere, of driving a despairing heart to some wild and frantic deed, for the folly of which my native

infirmity, or my creed, perhaps, may be held responsible. Hence, the sole origin of the interest that he may have taken in my fate. I use your very words, that I may disclaim the interpretation which you attach to them. I could not, in truth or in honour, affirm that I have received no marks of sympathy from him; but I should deceive you far more if I suffered you to imagine—how shall I say?—that your apprehensions are well founded."

"Very well, my dear girl," interposed Lord Tewkesbury, "I am perfectly satisfied. Do not agitate yourself any further."

"I have a word yet to add," resumed the ardent Cécile. "Now that you have rent nature's fair veil from my heart, all shall be disclosed. I do not feel myself justified, at present, in showing to you the sole communication that I have ever received from your son; but, ere long, no doubt, you will see it, and then you will be convinced that it cannot for an instant bear the construction ironically suggested by Lady Helen. I have told you that I sent no reply, because none was required; but yet, mark my words, Lord Tewkesbury, there will be an answer to it soon, and one that will satisfy even Lady Helen and yourself. Do you want me any more now?" added she, addressing both her interrogators.

"Yes; stop a moment," replied her aunt. "You have not been sparing in your accusations of others; you had better hear what I should otherwise have to say, on their part, in your absence. You were, as you need not have reminded us, a portionless orphan, alien to us in creed, in education, and, I might also add, by the forfeited station of your parents. Contrary to my expressed misgivings, Sir Charles was not satisfied with merely providing for you, which he might have done liberally in some other form; he introduced you, as a second daughter, into the bosom of his family, and what has been our reward? Our counsels spurned, our confidence betrayed, our family interest, and, far more, our family peace, blighted and destroyed. An evil genius have you been to me and mine, Cécile, and knowing that, as you well do, you might at least have the grace to remain silent. One word more; Edward will shortly, I trust, return here, and St. Edmunds, too, has his appointed place within our family circle. You must and shall learn to live with them, and with such as them, to the honest possession of whose

affections you may not pretend—you must and shall, I repeat, learn to live with them in the modest consciousness of your own position. My especial care shall henceforth be that you do so, for I now perceive how culpably negligent I have been.”

“May I go now?” again inquired Cécile, observing that her aunt had paused.

“You may.”

During the whole of that morning and afternoon, a succession of visitors kept the whole party at Redburn so closely engaged that the absence of Cécile, even at luncheon, could scarcely be observed. It was not before five o'clock that Constance, being at length released, sought her cousin's room; but on opening the door, she found her engaged in such earnest conversation with Father Athanasius, and with another priest far more advanced in life, that she hastily withdrew to her own premises. At dinner, it might have been remarked that St. Edmunds and Saint Cecilia were both immoderately thoughtful; but so courteous and kind was the repentant Lord Tewkesbury's manner to the latter, so animated were the spirits of Sir Charles, of Lady Helen, and of Constance, that the evening glided rapidly away.

At half-past ten, Lady Helen rose and said:

“Cécile, I am going to bed, and you had better come with me.”

The Saint immediately folded up her work, and prepared to obey.

At that moment, Lord Tewkesbury was watching, at the other end of the room, a game of chess which the fair Constance was playing with his son, and Sir Charles was indulging in his evening sleep nearer to the fireside. Cécile cast a wild tremulous glance around her, and then running to her uncle's arm-chair, kissed him gently upon his forehead, as she was wont to do in younger and happier days.

“Ah! what is it?” murmured the half-aroused Baronet.

“It was only I, dearest uncle, wishing you good night,” whispered Saint Cecilia.

“Oh! good night, my dear, good night!” replied he, returning her embrace ere he composed himself again to rest.

Cécile duly escorted her aunt to the door of her apartment. When they had reached it, she respectfully said good night to her, half extending at the same time a somewhat diffident hand. But this Lady Helen, though not short-sighted, did not doubtless perceive,

as she merely responded, in a haughty and distant tone, to the former compliment.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE THREE LETTERS.

THE elder members of the family assembled for breakfast at the usual hour on the following morning, and they were very speedily joined by St. Edmunds and Constance; but Cécile not having yet appeared, her cousin assumed the responsible office of making and distributing the tea.

“What is become of Mademoiselle?” cried Sir Charles, when the repast was half concluded. “She is breaking out, that girl, upon my word she is! she has been twice late within the last ten days.”

“I am ashamed to say that I have not seen her this morning,” replied the smiling Conny; “for I was late myself, and rushed straight down.”

“I suppose that she is engaged in cutting one of her hands off now,” observed Lady Helen.

Though this conjecture was uttered rather ironically than seriously, it seemed to make no small impression upon Constance, for, with an anxious look, she put down the cup that she was holding in her hand, and glided swiftly out of the room.

When, within a very few minutes, she returned, she was as pale as death—it is a real fact, though it may surprise those to whom the radiant hue of Constance Basinstoke's complexion is familiar. Never had the phenomenon been observed before, and yet the fair Constance's cheeks were actually colourless, as, slipping back into her chair, she exclaimed:

“It is done now! I have long foreseen that you would drive her to it.”

A general and confused exclamation of amazement was the sole reply.

“I knew that it would come to this,” resumed Constance, handing to her father a sealed letter addressed to him, and proceeding to open another for herself. “These are all that I have found.”

The letter to Sir Charles Basinstoke was as follows:

“My dearest Uncle,—I am leaving, for ever, your happy, happy home. Conny will tell you all, for I have neither time nor courage to write it now. Do not blame me and do not mourn for me. Believe me that I am consulting my own happiness and wel-

fare no less than those of others, while giving you, I trust, the surest proof of my life-long gratitude for all your unfailing kindness.

“Commend me respectfully to Lady Helen. It would be the mere mockery of a sacred sentiment to say that I am grateful to her. Still, if she conceives that she has anything to pardon, may she forgive as earnestly and sincerely as I do. You must deliver another message for me, dearest uncle. Pray kindly tell Lord Tewkesbury, that I trust he will now understand why I was so deeply moved yesterday morning. The enclosed letter for Lord St. Edmunds, which either he or you can deliver, will be found, I doubt not, fully to redeem the pledge I gave him.

“And now, my dearest uncle, think no more of poor Mademoiselle, who is happily and honourably disposed of. And yet you must not quite forget her either. You will remember her sometimes, not as she must have seemed in these last and miserable months, but as she was in the olden times, when she used to sit upon your knee, and her joyous laugh would recall to you her father’s. None will hear that laugh again; still she will be happy, and you must be so likewise.

“Farewell. My hourly prayer will be for every blessing from Heaven upon you and yours.
“CÉCILE.”

Though the writing was, in many places, defaced by sundry little blots of some very strongly diluted ink, the worthy Baronet read the letter through with tolerable freedom; but when it was concluded, he raised both his hands to his face, and then a sob was heard, so long and so loud, that it could not have proceeded from the gentle Constance, though the tears were, at that very moment, fast falling from her eyes also. Sir Charles Basinstoke is not much used to the melting mood. He had not been known to weep since the day when he had promised this same Cécile’s mother, on her death-bed, to be a second father to her orphan child. Was it that recollection which moved him so, if, in truth, that wild outburst of manly grief proceeded from him?

We have said that Constance was likewise in tears. She also is not much accustomed to yield to such human frailty without a good cause. Whether any such was afforded in the present instance, we shall judge, by ourselves glancing at the letter that she was reading:—

“My dearest Conny,—When you open this, I shall be far, far away. You will be the first perhaps to learn that I am gone, as you come tripping joyously in to scold me for not having joined you yet. Oh! how I have grieved at that thought alone, even amid so much wretchedness; but yet you will be less surprised than others.

“You have long known, dear Conny, that, through the sad infirmity of my disposition, I have suffered much at Redburn. You cannot, however, know all—you are too wise, too sensible, to allow your heart to bleed, as mine has bled, where no real misfortune was; still, the secret anguish was there, long, long since, though, until to-day, it did not quite surpass my powers of endurance. But when all my own torturing misgivings were realized; when I learnt that I was considered, what I well felt myself to be, the evil genius of the family; when I was accused of injuring all, and of betraying even you, then the hasty yet long-matured decision was irrevocably taken.

“There is a home, Conny, for the homeless. There is a refuge, even here below, where they who are weary indeed shall be at rest, and hear no more the voice of the task-master. Do you remember when, not so long ago, we read together of the Poet in the German Legend; how he came too late, when the earth and all its treasures were divided and shared, and how he was called, by the Almighty, to a higher and purer abode at His own side? I then said, Conny, that there was more than one moral to the lovely fable, and that that heavenly abode might be found even on the inhospitable surface of the long-occupied globe.

“Such is my bourn now. I must not say more yet; I have pledged myself that nothing should be revealed at present, and to hold, after this one, no communication whatsoever, for three whole months, with any whom I have formerly known. Then, we can write, and even, perhaps, meet again, though not often.

“I have told you that you do not know all. You have something to learn, which I am not quite free to reveal, but which you will hear in time from others. I have written to your cousin, Conny; see him, darling, and tell him, as I have, that I wish him to conceal nothing from you. He is well aware of what I have longed and prayed for on my knees to see accomplished. You have both within your reach happiness such as this

world can seldom afford. Oh! do not tempt the rigours of Providence by useless hesitations, scruples, or delay. All around you wish it even more than I had thought; none so ardently as I do. For the sake of the happy past, for the memory of all the counsel, and of the sister's vows that we two have shared, you will not reject my last parting word of advice.

"Adieu, dearest. The grey dawn is breaking, and it is more than time that the fugitive should be on her way. In three months, with God's blessing, we may meet again for some happy fleeting hour, and then, I trust, you will bear another and still nobler name."

"CÉCILE."

We have said that the Saint's letter to her uncle contained one for Lord St. Edmunds. It ran thus:—

"My dear Lord St. Edmunds,—You will excuse, I am sure, my having delayed until now returning any answer to your very pretty lines. Constance and your father, when they tell you all that has occurred, will give you my best reasons for not having replied sooner. You will be surprised, indeed, to hear what apprehensions have arisen around you, and how forgetful we have both been deemed of what we owe to our respective creeds and stations. I am not mistaken, however, I trust, in thinking that you will allow me to express the very sincere interest which I take in what concerns your happiness, and how truly I rejoice that you should have it in your power to secure, with the favour of Heaven, its most essential conditions. Few have known more intimately than I have her whose affections I have long and earnestly prayed that you should be so fortunate as to win. No one better than I can tell how deeply blessed he will be who may call her the partner of his life. It would be fearful, indeed, to pause or to doubt where so priceless a pearl may be possessed."

"I would willingly allude to another subject, which I believe to be in your thoughts as well as in mine; but while none can be more important, none also requires more mature consideration. Let, therefore, no hasty impulse, and, above all, no personal influence urge you to any precipitate decision. The truth, in due time, wherever it may be, will do its own work."

"Farewell. We shall never meet again,

but your happiness, and that of Conny, must always be my foremost earthly care."

"CÉCILE BASINSTOKE."

The day on which these letters were received and read was a gloomy one at Redburn Hall. It seemed as if the atmosphere itself were oppressed and burdened by some secret and heavy sorrow. We are speaking not figuratively, but positively. We have witnessed some such natural effect, and that not so long since, when, as it were in the full radiance of its lustre, the leading star of this Empire was obscured for ever. Then, as we departed with the dispersing crowds who had watched, and wept, and lingered to the last, it appeared to us as if the day-light of England were indeed darkened with that loss. So it was at Redburn on that day. Something was withdrawn, which had mingled so curiously with the life and breath of every one there, that nought could replace it—and yet it was gone for ever!

Neither Sir Charles Basinstoke nor his nephew were men to sit still, in such an emergency as this. Every domestic, every labourer, every tenant was interrogated. The railway station was visited, each official there closely questioned, and the more active and intelligent retainers were dispatched, through the neighbouring country, to obtain information. Father Athanasius was sent for and handed over to the gentle inquisition of Constance; but it was all in vain. He who alone could speak to the purpose was pledged to silence, and they who would most willingly have been communicative had all, without a single exception, been comfortably ensconced in their warm couches, whilst the Saint had been accomplishing her rapid and cheerless progress. Thus it was that a whole week elapsed ere, by a most ingenious and elaborate concatenation of conflicting evidence, the worthy Baronet was enabled to trace the fugitive's steps as far as the pleasant little Nunnery of Clitheroe in North Lancashire. There he accordingly proceeded, and even obtained admission, but offers, entreaties, and menaces were equally unavailing. The presence of a recently arrived postulant was not denied, but her own repeated injunctions were appealed to, as debarring all without from any intercourse or communication with her during three whole months. The discomfited Sir Charles was therefore constrained to return homewards, with scarcely more hope than he had entertained on starting.

We must now take our leave of Redburn. The Evil Genius of the old Hall having thus fortunately been withdrawn, the life there resumed that peaceful, untroubled, sedate complexion, which, while most gratifying to those more immediately interested, offers little interest to the intruder. We have only to add that, by all accounts, the Saint's last parting wishes met with the full amount of deferential regard which she was entitled to expect from all to whom they were addressed. Not only Lord St. Edmunds but his father also protracted their stay with their relatives. The fair Constance was seen in hourly and intimate communication with both, and more particularly with the former, while this constant and affectionate intercourse was watched and fostered, with the greatest complacency, by Sir Charles, by Lady Helen, and by Edward, who had re-appeared as expected. Before very long her Ladyship's lady's-maid intimated to Miss Basinstoke's lady's-maid, who was not at all surprised at the intelligence, that an auspicious event was near at hand;—and when our old acquaintance, the "Lincoln Express," reported and repeated the uncontradicted statement that Lord St. Edmund's marriage with his lovely cousin was fully decided upon, no one at Redburn was at all so thankful for the information as he ought to have been.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CONCLUSION.

Our narrative is verging to its conclusion. Indeed, were we to say that we have reached it, we trust that the immortal Sam Weller himself, if we were so fortunate as to secure him for a reader, would pronounce it to be a very good notion of a conclusion. Who is not satisfied? inquire we, and echo alone triumphantly replies, Who? Certainly not Lord Tewkesbury, nor Sir Charles, nor Lady Helen, whose long-cherished hopes will thus be realized. As to Miss Conny, pretty though she may deem herself, we cannot admit that she had a right to expect a better-looking, better-dressed, better-hearted, or, in short, a more suitable husband. He, to be sure, might be suspected of having, in an evil hour, looked another way. Still, as Lady Helen had truly said, he was by no means blind, and all who know Constance Basinstoke, or who, not knowing her, have been pleased to attend to our description of her blue eyes, her tight nose, and her manifold other perfections, must rest satisfied that her accepted

lover can have no cause to repine. As to Cécile, if we have mentioned her last, it is because all her wishes were evidently more completely gratified than those of any other party. Not only had she shaped out for herself that life-long repose for which she had so ardently sighed, but that which, as she has herself informed us, she had most anxiously longed and prayed for in regard to others, appeared also on the point of being accomplished. To be sure, the convent may seem to some a rather hazardous experiment for one of so ardent and aspiring a temperament. We, however, decidedly deem it a very fitting place for such a sententious and over-excitabile young lady, and whether so wild a bird frets itself to death against the bars of its cage, or is lost, like many of its fellows, in the trackless expanse of the ocean-clouds, its fate is, in neither case, very dissimilar.

Our conclusion being thus, decidedly, satisfactory to all in general, and to each in particular, we should be much inclined to let the curtain fall here, were it not for a critical inquiry which we imagine that we have just overheard; a Pervert is certainly alluded to in the title page, and who can this Pervert be? Not Lady Helen, no doubt, nor Sir Charles, nor the metaphysical Edward, nor Lady Templedale, nor Lord Tewkesbury. Perhaps, sapient reader, you may surmise that it was the lovely Conny herself, the more so that, since Cécile's departure, she certainly had been very repeatedly seen in long and earnest conversation with Father Athanasius. You would be mistaken, however, grievously mistaken. There is not, within the four seas of Britain, a stauncher or a safer Protestant than our little Conny, and what is more, as the modern phrase runs, we believe, she knows why. Indeed, we esteem that the Lord Chancellor of England could not select a more appropriate partner for his long-promised polka upon the reluctant head of the Romish Prelate. Constance Basinstoke then, we fearlessly assert, is not the expected Pervert, nor her accepted husband either, which is more, so that this mysterious renegade must be sought for elsewhere.

We are to suppose that three months and a few days have elapsed since Cécile's flight from Redburn Hall. Sir Charles is still detained there, by a fit of the gout; Lady Helen is closely attending upon him; while Conny and Edward have proceeded to London on a

visit to their uncle, Lord Tewkesbury. The morning is fast advancing, and in that same little back study, where our not very eventful drama opened, the fair Constance is sitting, in evident expectation of some long-wished-for incident. The day is an important one, in truth, for it is that which has been fixed for her first meeting with Saint Cecilia. Perhaps it may seem strange that this meeting should take place in London, and not at the very pleasant little nunnery of Clitheroe. All that we can say is, that this is through no fault of Conny's, who had repeatedly expressed her willingness to proceed to Lancashire; but though this had been previously arranged, at first, Father Athanasius had finally preferred that the recluse should come to London herself, for a day, a little change of air having been recommended to her, as her health and spirits had suffered by the too sudden transition.

A loud knock is heard without, the door of the room is cast open, and the two cousins are locked in each other's embrace. A moment of speechless but not tearless joy ensues, and the silence is first broken by Constance.

"This is a happy dream indeed, dearest Cécile."

"Conny, it is."

"Sit down now, and let me look at your darling face. You are very pale, dearest, and thinner too. I had heard that you were not very well."

"I am a little tired with the journey, Conny, and too great joy always overpowers me. Besides, the change of life must always be felt a little at first."

"So I should think, indeed," replied her now smiling cousin. "It must be an awful undertaking for you. Don't you think sometimes of the free air of poor Redburn, of our walks, our drives, and our glorious liberty?"

"Often, Conny, very often."

"But you have taken no fatal and irrevocable vows yet?"

"No, dearest, none would be accepted for a year; but my determination is all unaltered."

"Really? That is beyond my conception."

"Ah! Conny," resumed the Saint, sadly, "there is many a bright hour, to be sure, in the noble world without, but many a cruel pang there withal. I have not forgotten, I never can forget, all that I have forfeited; but I can recollect, also, how deadly was the thrust of relentless irony, and how far deeper

still the anguish of sympathy which might not be requited. These have done their worst by me now; but enough of myself. You are looking very well, Conny, and in the greatest beauty."

"Well, I have not had time to be ill since we parted. I never was busier in my life, and, I might add, happier, had it not been for your absence, you good-for-nothing child."

"All is—settled—quite settled, I understand."

"Why, we have had much preparation and preliminary arrangement, to be sure, and we have all endeavoured to carry out your wishes to the utmost of our power."

Cécile was about to express her satisfaction and gratitude, when both fair cousins were startled by a sharp knock at the door.

"Dear me! I quite forgot to say that we are not at home," cried Constance, as she ran to apprise the servant without; but she was informed by him that it was only Lord St. Edmunds.

"Conny," gasped out the trembling Cécile, "you surely have not forgotten your promise?"

"What promise, Cécile? that my intended should not be here? certainly not."

Scarcely, however, had her written pledge been thus renewed, when our hero deliberately entered the room.

"Oh! Conny, this is very cruel," murmured this heroic Saint, as she sank down breathless, and soon senseless, upon the couch.

"That is all right—don't be alarmed," exclaimed Conny. "It is what I foretold, you know, and she will soon recover. There now, sit down upon the sofa, at once, and support her head. The Eau de Cologne will recall her immediately."

No sooner could the poor Saint gaze, with returning consciousness, upon the animated countenances of her two companions, than she whispered, in a sorely reproachful tone:

"Oh! Constance, what fearful mockery is this?"

"No mockery at all," replied her cousin; "only the type, I trust, of what is to be."

Thus speaking, she took one of the Saint's small hands, enclosed it in the manly grasp of St. Edmunds, and then, muttering something about her Uncle Tewkesbury, she rushed joyously out of the room.

When, in about half an hour, she returned with the latter personage, our hero and the

Saint were still sitting upon the sofa, their hands joined, and looking certainly as if they understood each other pretty well.

"St. Edmunds," exclaimed his father, "is all settled?"

"Well, I do not know," was the reply. "I cannot make her believe that we are all in earnest."

"We had feared something of the kind," resumed Lord Tewkesbury, "and it was on this account that we have interrupted you so soon. My dear Cécile," continued he, "I trust that you will ere long allow me to say, my dear child, you have already learned, I make no doubt, how truly you have won my son's heart; but you have yet to hear, perhaps, how you have also captivated mine. I will not recall in what very painful circumstances I first ascertained all that St. Edmunds would gain if he were so fortunate as to secure your affections; but you must believe me when I tell you that, even when I have done my utmost for your future happiness, I shall still consider that I have yet much to atone for."

"Oh! do not say so," muttered Cécile. "I am all unworthy of so much kindness! How can I thank you for it?"

"If thanks are due, Cécile, it is not to me," resumed the Earl. "We are all much indebted to my old friend Fastwell, or Athanasius, as he calls himself now, who has been throughout, I must say, most intelligent, most solicitous, and most discreet; but he has not been our principal manager. The chief credit decidedly appertains to another little personage, a witch, if ever one was framed, who, with the most consummate skill, energy, and activity, has smoothed every obstacle, and prepared the way before us."

"Now, Uncle Tewkesbury," exclaimed the laughing Constance, "no tales out of school, if you please."

"You may withdraw, my dear," playfully answered her uncle, "if you are too modest to hear the truth; but I must tell it none the less. Well, this same little enchantress, who, it would seem, had at a very early stage indeed, discovered how matters really stood, succeeded, when the crisis came, in extorting from Fastwell sundry confirmations of her own impressions. Corresponding avowals having been more distinctly obtained from St. Edmunds, the scheme was duly formed, and I was admitted into the secret. She began by declaring to me, that it was

perfectly out of the question for me to expect that she could ever take the slightest interest in my son's fate——"

"Oh! my dear uncle," interrupted Conny, "how can you say such things!"

"We must be precise and literal, must we? I shall try and recall your exact words. 'I thought, at one time,' said she to me, 'that he would do very well, and I for him also; but I soon found out that we could never agree. In the first place, his affections are set upon another, which would not suit my book at all; and then, he is a Roman Catholic at heart, which settles the question.' Do you recognise the version now, Miss Conny?"

"No, I cannot say that I do, Lord Tewkesbury—entirely."

"Well, I have done my best to be faithful, at all events. To proceed, however, as her marriage with her cousin was very much wished for by both her parents, and as she is far too dutiful to withstand their desires, she devised a little plan of her own for insuring their opposition. While pretending to accept Master St. Edmunds's pretended addresses, she effectually raised the most terrific alarms, in her father and mother's mind, respecting her *futur's* religious tendencies. She no less artfully inculcated the apprehension that Edward would not fail to deliver you, Cécile, from the Convent, and to marry you in everybody's teeth. Ha! ha! ha!" continued the Earl, "I really cannot help laughing, when I remember the state of agonized terror into which this girl and her brother—for Edward had a finger in the pie too, I must tell you—finally managed to throw that poor Helen. Both her children married to Papists, and, what is more, each of them very likely to be respectively converted by the union! Ha! ha! ha!"

So contagious was Lord Tewkesbury's laugh, that none present could forbear to join in it; but he soon resumed:

"Well, matters were thus brought to that pitch that almost any alternative seemed preferable to the long wished-for consummation; and ultimately, the greatest comfort and relief were afforded when it was suggested that, after all, an arrangement might be devised which would leave both Edward and Constance unperturbed and free. Another and most important point was still to be gained. I will not conceal from you, Cécile, that I was at first very much grieved and shocked when I ascertained how seriously St. Edmunds's Protestant convictions were

shaken, and that I was most unwilling to sanction, in any way, the step which he is about to take. I trust that I resisted so long as resistance could be of any avail; nor did I yield until I was positively assured by this same Conny, that otherwise I must expect to see my son become a Trappist, or something very extraordinary. With her, with you Cécile, and, above all, with himself, as now fully arrived at years of discretion, this grave responsibility must rest."

"I will not shrink from my share of it, at all events," replied the smiling Conny. "I am very sorry that St. Edmunds should differ from us all, but I do think that such unsettled minds as his are as well away from us as with us; and he must excuse me for saying that I do not imagine our Church will fall, because she loses him and such as him."

"I trust so, indeed," resumed Lord Tewkesbury. "And now, dear Cécile, as we are never to hear the fell sound of controversy, either in Cavendish Square or at St. Edmunds, allow me to say one word to you on the subject, and then to dismiss it for ever. Wiser than we are in your own esteem, you unscrupulously condemn all who disagree with you, and mark what is the result. Here is Conny, your more than sister, as you truly call her—she wears no torturing bracelet round her arm; her hair is suffered to retain its natural length; her prayers are to God alone; she believes the Redemption to be all efficient for her sins, and the Bible all sufficient for her instruction; and yet she has emulated, nay, she has overcome you in your generous conflict of self-sacrifice. If there is justice in heaven, its gates will not be closed against such as *her*."

"Oh! do not malign me by saying that I doubt it," muttered the all-unnerved Cécile, whose tears had been flowing fast whilst the preceding explanations had been imparted to her. "I believe, I must believe, the truth to be fixed, uniform, and unchangeable; but still more firmly do I cling to the hope that God is all merciful. If I am mistaken, may He pity and spare me; if she is, thus, thus I kneel to the sanctity of her error."

"Darling Cécile, what can you mean? But all this has unhinged you a little."

"It has," faltered the still weeping Saint; "you have all been, you are all so much too kind. How can I deserve it, how can I requite it?"

"By being henceforth as happy as it is possible to be," replied Conny, embracing her

tenderly. "But, Uncle Tewkesbury, had not you and I better leave them alone now?"

"Oh! one moment more, dear Conny," said Cécile, arresting her. "I had understood that Edward was in town with you; am I not to see him, to thank him too?"

"No," answered Conny, more gravely. "He will do very well, as well as I shall, I am convinced, in the end—but he would rather not meet you at present, and I agree with him. Perhaps you do not know that he has resigned his seat, and that he is going abroad so soon as we can assure him that he is no more wanted for our now happily concluded arrangements. He is a good boy, after all, and has behaved very well in all this. By the by, I have a wedding present for you from him."

Thus speaking, the fair Constance opened a large writing-box, close at hand, and produced an *écrin*, bearing sundry coronets and ciphers.

"Do you know this?" continued she, laughing. "Every long lock and tress of a certain fugitive's hair, which we found still suspended in her room after her departure, has been saved, with the tenderest care, and committed to the skill of the renowned Monsieur Réséda. It is he who has mounted them upon all these curious clasps, springs, and double pins. With these he affirms that, after one hour's teaching, your maid will be able to secure the original hair on its original and very original little head, in such a manner as far to surpass anything that nature could achieve. Lest, however, the device should be detected in the broad daylight of the presentation, Edward has added these diamond appendages. I had not seen them since they have been mounted, and, upon my word, they are not so ugly."

"They are magnificent, dearest Conny—much too splendid for me."

"Not now, darling," replied Constance; "but I have better news for you, or rather for St. Edmunds yet. The same Monsieur Réséda informed me, yesterday evening, that within two years your own real hair will be quite itself again. He even pledges himself that, if it is not then full as long, and full as fine as ever it was before, he will publicly admit that Monsieur Jasmin's *talent* is superior to his own. Stop a moment," continued Conny, as she was closing the writing-box, "I had actually forgotten this letter from my father, which you can read later at your leisure."

When opened, in due time, Sir Charles's missive was found to contain, besides many kind and truly paternal congratulations, the information that, with Edward's full assent, an annuity of three hundred pounds a-year was settled upon the future Lady St. Edmunds.

"But Lady Helen," whispered Cécile, not without a slight tremor, as Constance and her uncle were retiring, "will she ever see me again?"

"Oh! certainly, dear, as often as you like," answered Conny. "It is all right again now, though, perhaps, at first, she was a little disappointed, to be sure—but mostly, be it whispered, through her own fault. Don't you agree, Uncle Tewkesbury?"

"Yes; Helen neglected a great truth. In singling you out as a victim, Cécile, she impassioned, in your behalf, the sympathies of the indifferent and of the impartial. She had forgotten that, if religious persecution is impossible to all now, religious vexation equally defeats its own end. We are free, I firmly believe, widely to differ from you, but we may not revile you with impunity. You are too illustrious in history, too great in civilized Europe, too important, as yet at least, in Christendom.

CHAPTER XX.

BEING THE DEDICATION.

WE have concluded with Lord Tewkesbury's concluding observation, because it embodies the humble moral of our homely narrative. Having now ascertained who the Pervert is, we have only to add, that his marriage with the fair Saint has actually taken place. The ceremony was performed by Cardinal Wiseman himself, and, having been among the guests, we were happy to see that his Eminence was in excellent health, as one should look who has certainly entered upon a somewhat arduous undertaking.

Our tale being now truly and duly ended, we must proceed to the Dedication.

We may not inscribe it to you, dear Lady

Wickliffestown. You are convinced that it is written by the Jesuits, perhaps by Cardinal Wiseman himself—to aid in the perversion of Protestant England, nor would anything which we could say alter your impression on that point.

Neither may we place it under your invocation, dear Lady East-Oriel. You are persuaded that our object is to cast ridicule upon many recent conversions, by the selection of our Pervert—a charge, we must say, fully as unfounded as the former; for we can assure you that in the whole Household Brigade, there are very few young men, if any, more deeply read than our hero.

Gladly, in this perplexity, would we dedicate the little work to the people of England at large, our own indulgent task-master. But as this exalted and ubiquitous personage might then deem that we have intended some indirect and disguised reflections upon his recent excitement, which would be very impertinent indeed, and very ungrateful too on our part, we decidedly had better take no liberties with the still growling Lion, and look elsewhere.

Who then shall be our patron, for surely none ever so sorely required one? Truly, it shall be Mr. Colburn himself, the modern Mæcenæ, who so munificently encouraged our earlier efforts in the imaginative line. We have heard that, in an ill-advised hour, he pronounced "Love and Ambition" to be a failure, a heresy which all must esteem well worthy of being handed over to the persecution of Cardinal Wiseman. He still affirms, we believe, that the British Public never open a work of fiction, except it be presumed to contain what may be equally found in real and every-day life. They may therefore be inclined to look into one which touches upon a subject that certainly has had, and still has, its due share of their consideration. And if, in this hope, we have been so imprudent as to re-enact, despite the experience of ages, the desperate part of Hersilia, at least have we thrust foremost into the perilous adventure one as fair and as gentle as herself.

THE END.

Rockingham, Charles de Jarnac

Cécile; or, the Pervert

Paris 1852

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